GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 625. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 22ND, 1900. [TWOPENCE.

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S.S.
Dec. 22, 1900.

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Christmas Double Number.

SHORT STORIES.

No. 625.] For the Week Ending December 22nd, 1900. [TWOPENCE.

A Near Thing

By GERTRUDE PAGE.

Author of "There is No If," "The Night of the Ball," etc., etc.

WHEN a man has lost five hundred pounds through an unlucky speculation, has had his head-clerk set up for himself in opposition to him, and has heard that the old bachelor uncle, from whom he had expectations, is thinking of getting married, he is not likely to feel very jovial, even when starting on his holiday. All this, to say nothing of minor worries, had happened to Ted Hall in the week preceding Christmas, and when on December 24th, he drove through a cutting east wind to the station, his state of mind was neither amiable nor enviable.

"First single to Wilstead," he said gruffly at the ticket-office, regarding the clerk with a somewhat injured air, as if he were fixing a destination to please him, very much against his wish. Afterwards he looked at the ticket in much the same way.

"What the dickens Anderson wanted to choose a hydro for I can't imagine," he muttered. "Of all the idiotic places! He might just as well have gone to a lunatic asylum."

A girl hurried past him, and, catching her foot or skirt against his stick, knocked it down.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she exclaimed, stopping a second, and flashing a pair of bright eyes in his face. Then she rushed on after a porter.

"You must be sure and see it put in yourself," he heard her exclaim; "if I arrive to-night without my box I'm sure there'll be a tragedy."

"All right, miss, I'll see to it," the man replied laughingly, and the girl laughed, too. In fact, nearly everyone on the station was laughing more or less, for it was Christmas Eve, and even railway porters, and bustling travellers, and tired parents with babies generally manage to be cheerful on that auspicious occasion.

All except "Ted Halls," who have a whole list of grievances, and feel the world and everyone in it is against them.

"Silly idiot!" he grumbled. "I wish she'd look where she's going, instead of fussing so about her precious box. I'm certain to lose the silver cap now; it was loose before," and he examined his stick moodily.

The train was standing in the station, and after selecting a smoking compartment, and throwing his rug into a corner, he tucked his hands in his overcoat pockets, and strolled up and down.

Presently the bright-eyed girl walked briskly along the platform. As she passed him, she looked into his face, and Ted felt annoyed. He didn't actually scowl, but he felt very much inclined to. He looked sufficiently haughty, however, to tickle Jill Haslam's fancy, and when she had likewise placed her rug in a corner seat, she tucked her hands in her muff and strolled out on to the platform, with a vague idea of annoying him if possible, out of pure mischief. She wondered if he had taken a seat yet, thinking it would be rather fun if he got into her carriage without knowing it, as he was evidently very vexed with her for knocking his stick over, and very cross generally.

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When she repassed him, she resolutely looked in the opposite direction; but a few paces further on she turned suddenly, and found he had done the same,

"Thank you," she replied shortly, and placed the shilling on the seat beside her.

which was just what she wanted, as she felt certain it would irritate him.

He struck her as fancying himself very much, seeing he was exceedingly well-dressed and groomed, and very good-looking; and conceited men were Jill's pet aversion. She could never resist a possible opportunity of annoying them.

She was not able to give him any more of her attention however, as she was expecting two brothers to join her, if they could catch the train, and was eagerly on the look-out for them. When the guard came to see the tickets they had not arrived, so she was reluctantly obliged to take her seat and start without them.

Ted Hall thought she was rather forward to remain on the platform watching the passengers, and took his seat with a vague thanksgiving that there were smokers for men.

"I shouldn't wonder if she isn't going to the Hydro," he mused gloomily, "she's just the kind of girl one meets there. Can't think what Anderson was dreaming of. Wish I hadn't promised to join him."

He took out a letter and glanced at the end, where a sentence ran: "Wilstead's a grand place, you're sure to like it. Good dancing and excellent links. I know a very jolly girl going, who is the best dancer in Shrewsbury, and she is sure to know others."

"A nice lot they'll be I expect," he mused. "Beastly matrimonial agencies, that's what hydros are."

His ill-luck seemed to dog him, for at the first station they stopped at, four noisy youths got into his carriage, and made it impossible for him to read.

When they commenced singing comic songs he lost his patience and scowled at them. The train was then in another station, and on one of them making a personal and impudent remark, he calmly gathered up his belongings and stepped out, making for the nearest compartment, which happened to be Jill's. At the moment he had forgotten her, and his feelings were not soothed when he recognised his companion.

"He looks as cross as a bear," was Jill's mental summing-up, and she dived into her book again.

Now it happened Jill Haslam was not a very clever traveller. She was one of those passengers who always imagine they ought to be changing, or that they are in the wrong train, and, in consequence, she occasionally got a little flurried.

This was the case when she suddenly thought she heard a porter call "Lichfield." She had been told she might have to change there, and she was in a terrible fright that she had remained quietly reading when she ought to be getting out. She sprang up and looked from the window, but no one was at hand, so in her extremity she turned hastily to Ted Hall and said:

"Could you tell me if this is Lichfield?"

Hall was still feeling very ruffled, and he replied a little testily:

"I really don't know."

Just then a porter came along, and Jill was reassured, so with a cutting glance at her companion, who was now stolidly reading, she reseated herself with a feeling of bitter resentment because of his rudeness.

When the train stopped again, however, as if from a feeling of compunction, he remarked:

"Was it Redfield you wanted, because I think this is it?"

"No, thank you," she replied very haughtily, and the enmity became mutual.

But fate had not done with them yet, for at the next station a boy with a large truck of single cups of tea stood a few yards distant from their carriage. Hall opened the window and shouted for one. When the boy brought it, Jill quietly ordered another for herself, and Hall at once, though very stiffly, offered her his Jill hesitated, and then stiffly accepted it. When the boy brought the second there was no time to spare, and while she was trying to ask him how much it was, Hall gave him a shilling and held out his hand for the change.

"It's all right," said the boy, pocketing the shilling, and the train moved slowly away.

Jill glared at his retreating figure, and Hall scowled at his paper, but nothing could alter the fact that he had paid for her tea, and they had been taken as belonging to each other.

"I have only a shilling," she said frigidly, holding the coin out to him.

"I'm afraid I have no change," he replied, without meeting her eyes.

Jill grew exasperated.

"Then you must take it all," she said, still holding the coin before him.

He looked at her a moment, and was about to say it didn't signify, but wisely changed his mind.

"Perhaps I can change it at the next station," he said instead.

"Thank you," she replied shortly, and placed the shilling on the seat beside her, directly under his eyes.

Hall called the boy a fool under his breath and returned to his paper.

The next station chanced to be Lichfield, and they both alighted. To Jill's relief, a newspaper boy stood close at hand, so she was able to change the money herself, and hand him his sixpence, without any further need of speech, hurrying away directly.

"Of all the rude men!" she muttered, as she once

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more settled herself in a comfortable corner and tucked her rug round her.

She was still thinking about him when she took her seat in the Hydro omnibus, and wondered a little why he was so cross. There were no other passengers, so she was congratulating herself upon getting away quickly, and possibly getting dressed in time for dinner.

But just as the coachman whipped up his horse, a porter shouted, "Hi! wait a moment! Passenger for the Hydro!" and as the 'bus stopped with a jerk, the door was hastily opened, and Hall scrambled in, the porter slamming the door behind him, and the horse starting off at a brisk pace.

Jill had a keen sense of humour, and her first impulse was to burst out laughing. But she was also very angry with him, and instead she carefully turned her head away and stared out into the night.

She would no doubt have congratulated herself warmly upon her action had she known he was inwardly remarking with disgust, "Of course—just the hydro class—as I thought!"

When they arrived, he sprang out first, because he was next to the door, and as the hall-porter stood waiting to take her wraps, he ran up the steps at once.

In the doorway a tall, fair girl stood watching eagerly, and when she saw Jill she exclaimed:

"Come along! How late you are! I've been watching ever so long. Where are the boys?"

"I waited on purpose for them," Jill replied, after greeting her, "and then the sillies went and missed the train. They won't get here until ten now; too late to dance. I wish I'd never waited."

"So do I; we've had such a jolly afternoon on the ice. But come along and dress; you'll have to hurry tremendously. We've got a lovely big room, and mother is just down the passage. We're going to have no end of a time."

"What a good-looking man that was who came up in the 'bus with you!" she continued, when they reached their room. "Do you know who he is?"

"No, and I don't want to, the rude thing! He got in at Shrewsbury. Did you ever see such a scowl? And he might be the Prince of Wales, the way he fancies himself. We travelled part of the way together; but I'll tell you about it afterwards. I shall have to hurry frightfully now."

"I suppose Will Anderson has come?" she said, as they went down the wide staircase together to the dining-hall.

"Yes, rather; and he's in great form. He came yesterday to help arrange the tableaux for Thursday. He's got a friend coming who is an excellent dancer; isn't it jolly? The floor is splendid; we tried it this morning."

At the foot of the stairs, one of two men who appeared to be making inquiries at the office, suddenly turned away and met the two girls face to face.

"Jill, by all that's good!" he exclaimed, coming forward with outstretched hand. "When did you arrive? and where are those scoundrels Phil and Gerald?"

"They missed the train," she replied, shaking hands warmly, "I wish I hadn't waited for them. I might have been skating here all the afternoon."

"Of course you might. The ice is simply glorious. We're going to have a grand holiday. Let me introduce my friend Hall to you. Here, Ted, old chap!" he called, "when you've done flirting with Miss Williams!"

Ted Hall turned at once, and a second later, he and Jill were bowing gravely to each other with icy formality.

"Miss Hayward, another perfect dancer," Anderson ran on in his usual gay fashion. "Mabel, let me introduce Mr. Hall to you."

Mabel Hayward was tall, slender, and very pretty, with just a suggestion of frailty, and a quiet, dignified manner. Jill, on the other hand, had glossy brown hair and laughing brown eyes and was full of life and spirits. She had seven brothers who all worshipped her and spoilt her, and she was in consequence a little impatient and quick-tempered, and very much upon her dignity when ruffled. This was why she chatted very fast and very merrily with Will Anderson at dinner, resolutely refusing to notice his friend more than she could possibly help, and then generally to administer a delicate snub. Not that Ted Hall minded in the least, as a matter of fact he was rather glad, as it fell to his share to entertain Mabel, whose quiet, deliberate manner was much more to his taste just then.

He was rather disappointed, however, when she excused herself from dancing with him. He had watched her round the ball-room with Anderson, and knew that his friend had not over-estimated her powers. He was a perfect waltzer himself, and rather particular whom he danced with, so that most girls regarded it as a direct compliment to be asked. Jill guessed as much,

"I am only dancing a very little," she replied coldly.

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especially as he did not ask her until he had seen her performance, and she chose to think that he considered he was conferring a favour on her, and declined to accept it.

"I am only dancing a very little," she replied coldly to his measured request. "I am expecting my brothers shortly, and shall join them when they arrive."

He bowed formally and retired, and Jill had the two following with Will Anderson, who was rather at a loss to understand his good fortune.

For Will had long been an admirer of Jill's, and, though he never seemed to make much progress, he continued to hope on.

Ted Hall easily gathered as much from Mabel, and watched the pair with some degree of interest.

After Phil and Gerald had arrived, the Shrewsbury party met together in a small ante-room to have a little merrymaking on their own account. Hall sat quietly in an armchair, looking on, without taking much part, scarcely being noticed at all until Jill remarked sarcastically:

"I'm afraid Mr. Hall thinks we are very frivolous and childish."

"Not at all," he replied calmly, as she looked towards him. "In any case, it is always nice to be able to cheat the years."

Jill flushed angrily.

"True," she retorted; "but it's hard lines when it's no longer any use trying."

"Pass when collared, Jill," shouted one of her brothers, and her attention was instantly diverted by a silk handkerchief in her face, which she had only just time to throw back before Will Anderson hurled himself across the room towards her. Hall's lips meanwhile relaxed into a sarcastic curl just as Will tripped up and fell against Jill, pushing her on to the arm of his chair. She freed herself angrily, saying clearly:

"I beg your pardon. I hope we have not disturbed you. Mr. Anderson is so boisterous. You should be more careful, Will," she added, "Mr. Hall doesn't like being ruffled."

"Rot! He wants waking up," and Will aimed a cushion straight at his head.

Hall stopped it with his foot, and afterwards threw it back, breaking into a low laugh when it knocked a paper out of Will's hand from which he was holding forth.

"You're too bad, Will," said Jill coolly. "You forget Mr. Hall hasn't had his after-dinner nap yet."

When they all said good-night to each other outside Mrs. Hayward's door, she purposely overlooked him, and kept Will talking idly because his friend was waiting for him.

Later on, when she and Mabel were discussing the guests, the latter remarked:

"How quaint Mr. Hall is!"

"He's just eaten up with conceit," was Jill's quick reply, "and he's far too engrossed in himself to make conversation."

"I don't think so," Mabel answered thoughtfully. "Will would never care for a conceited man, and he thinks so much of Mr. Hall. He was telling me about him this morning. I should always trust Will's judgment."

"Oh! Will makes mistakes sometimes the same as others, though, of course, Mr. Hall may be all right with men; he's insufferable with women. I never saw such condescension," which made it evident that Jill's temper had not improved.

"I haven't noticed it," Mabel said rather shortly. "I think he's very nice; anyhow, he's a perfect dancer—better than Will, if possible."

Jill made no answer, but turned the conversation to the other visitors, and presently scrambled into bed and relapsed into silence. Her first evening had not been altogether a success, in spite of her seemingly radiant spirits. She had had a little too much of Will Anderson, for one thing. She had commenced by being unusually affable, in order to impress upon his friend how perfectly content she was without his company, and Will had not unnaturally taken advantage of her charming mood. He had become very lover-like indeed, and, as usual, Jill had grown bored.

"How are you and Will getting on?" Mabel asked presently.

In spite of all her efforts, and she had made them to please her brothers, she could not fall in love with Will Anderson. Directly he became ardent he bored her, so she had always decided that she had known him too long. But she had made fresh resolutions this Christmas, because she knew what a good, reliable fellow he was, and she was exceedingly fond of him. She really meant to let him have his way, and settle things.

But he was not her last thought that night. Before she went to sleep she told herself she wished he would not have such objectionable friends, and cast about in her mind for a possible opportunity of further snubbing Ted Hall on the morrow.

As it happened, however, Ted was one too many for her, and with a delicate skill that made it apparent only to herself, coolly avoided any contact with her whatever, both that day and the following.

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On the evening of the second night, Mabel, who had had a great deal of his company, pronounced him charming, and was in a most annoyingly placid mood. Jill felt inclined to throw something at her, as she calmly brushed her hair and drawled it out. She, herself, felt all upside down and disturbed from end to end, so that it irritated her beyond everything. Both her brothers had spent most of their time with special friends of their own, and she had been drafted off perpetually with Will Anderson.

At first it had been all right, but later on the old boredom gained ground, particularly at the ball on Bank Holiday, when Ted Hall had purposely not asked her for a dance. She had laughed and talked very much on account of his constant proximity, but it had been a decided effort. He, on the other hand, beyond continuing depressed, had remained perfectly calm and unruffled; never looking in her direction, and seemingly unaware of her existence. At least he never looked when she could possibly perceive it, but at occasional moments, he shot a keen glance of scrutiny at her, because he was interested in her on account of her relations with Will Anderson, who had long been a great friend of his.

"How are you and Will getting on?" Mabel asked presently, with her back to the light.

"Much as usual," was the rather callous reply.

"You haven't settled anything?" with feigned carelessness.

"Certainly not; there's heaps of time yet."

Mabel was silent, and Jill pulled two buttons off her shoes in a fit of impatience.

Suddenly she picked one up and threw it into a far corner. "I won't marry Will," she exclaimed, and kicked the other one after it.

A slight flush coloured Mabel's pale face, but she still said nothing.

"It's absurd of anyone to wish it," Jill went on; "we're not in the least suited to each other. Anyone can see we're too much alike. Just think what a din there would always be in the house. He can't help laughing and chattering and I'm sure I can't. I want someone to listen to me, instead of always making jokes of their own. I know he's a good fellow"—she dug her small fist into the pillow as if it had done her an injury, by way of impressing her remark—"probably the best fellow I ever knew, or ever shall know, but I might as well marry my own brother Bob. I'm not sure I wouldn't rather, for Bob and I do fall out sometimes, but Will would be so eternally forgiving and patient with me, I should want to scream. I don't believe in marrying a man who lets you treat him anyhow. I like a man who requires a little managing, it's so much more interesting."

"I'm sure no one wants you to marry Will against your inclination," Mabel remarked quietly.

"No, but they want me to want to marry him," petulantly. "I'll tell you what, Mabel," with a sudden inspiration, "it's you that ought to have Will, not I. You'd make a perfect pair. I wonder why I never thought of it before."

Mabel flushed a sudden deep scarlet, and then gradually became deathly white, but she made no comment.

Long ago, at least it seemed long ago to her, she had learnt suddenly that Will Anderson loved Jill Haslam. There was nothing at all extraordinary about the news, but it meant for her that the love-dream of her life was over. She had made no plaint and she had not seemed to fret, but ever since she had cultivated that quiet, placid and seemingly passionless exterior. This Christmas she expected the engagement finally settled, and was prepared to be one of the first to congratulate Jill. When the latter expressed her opinion thus candidly, she was at a loss how to take her. One of her first thoughts was for Will himself.

"If you feel like that, why have you led him on so the last three days?" she asked presently. "It's rather a shame, I think."

Jill pouted a little. "I haven't," she said, after a pause. "I only didn't send him away. There was no object in being rude."

"No, but you have been distinctly more friendly than usual."

"Well, I tell you, I meant to settle things."

"Then what has made you change your mind? wonderingly,

"I don't know. I suppose I'm fickle. I'm sure I hate myself enough," dashing a blinding tear from her eye.

Mabel regarded her in mute amazement.

"Oh, you're out of sorts," she remarked, "you'll think quite differently to-morrow."

"It's all very well for you, you never do worry yourself, but I can't help being disappointed. Everything seems to be going wrong this year, because I expected it to be better than usual. I'm not enjoying myself a bit."

"Whyever not?"

"I'm sure I don't know, except that Bob's always off with Miss Webster and—and—oh, I don't know, but I wish we were going home to-morrow."

"Why don't you talk to Mr. Hall for a change? He's really very nice, only he's down on his luck about something, and it makes him quiet."

"He isn't," savagely, "he thinks we're all beneath his notice. I heard him tell a man he hated hydros. Why doesn't he stay away if he doesn't like it, instead of coming and giving himself such ridiculous airs."

Mabel turned away with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Oh, I give you up," she said, "you're really very unreasonable to-night."

Jill did not reply, but she hid her burning face in the pillow, and half wished she had never been born.

* * * * *

One of the principal arrangements of the Christmas week at Wilstead, was the golf handicap for visitors at the hydro, and the great event of it the scratch Foursomes.

On the morning of the day, a great rush was made for the notice-board, where the players were bracketed, as drawn. Jill was generally one of the first, but this year she walked up very leisurely towards the chattering, laughing group. As she passed her brother Bob and Miss Webster, she heard the latter remark with a little laugh, "How very curious, isn't it? Don't you think they ought to be allowed to exchange? I'm sure they'd all four be ready enough, and Jill can't endure Mr. Hall."

She passed on, wondering what she meant, and found her own name bracketed with Hall's, while just beneath were Mabel's and Will Anderson's.

She understood perfectly.

She turned away slowly to the door, and stood thoughtfully looking out. Supposing anything were said about an exchange, what should she do?

"They can't," she smiled; "it would be impossible."

Then she heard Mabel's voice behind her.

"I don't know whether she'll play with him," she was saying; "she won't if she's made up her mind not to."

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"Well, I daresay we could arrange it all right," replied Will's voice. "We'll ask her."

A man had sauntered up and stood near her, leaning against a pillar idly smoking. She had been too engaged with her own thoughts to notice him particularly before; but now, as she half turned to meet Will and Mabel, their eyes met. It was Ted Hall, and she knew that he, too, had overheard. She tried to look at him defiantly; but she felt the blood creeping to her face, and turned her head away. He did not look quite the same, somehow; there was a little less self-assurance in his attitude and expression, and, instead of the usual gloom, just a shade of sadness.

As Will and Mabel came towards her he moved carelessly away, saying, as he passed them, that he had an appointment in the billiard-room.

Before he had finished his game Will came up to speak to him, standing aside while he completed his stroke.

"So she's made the exchange," he mused, with a vague feeling that it was very small of her, and turned to hear Will's information.

"I'm just arranging the times," Will said hurriedly. "You and Miss Haslam play Whitehead and Miss Pearce at three o'clock. Don't be late, will you?"

"Miss Haslam?" he asked, in a momentary surprise.

"Yes, you were drawn together. Just your usual luck," he added, with a laugh; "she's quite one of the best ladies."

They walked to the ground together, talking casually on the weather and such-like uninteresting subjects.

They walked to the ground together.

Both felt a little constrained; but Jill showed it the most, probably because she was the most anxious to appear at ease. Suddenly the conversation turned upon dogs, and dogs happened to be Jill's hobby. It happened to be Hall's also, and they were soon so engrossed that they almost walked past the entrance to the links. They won their match easily, both first and second round, and Hall remarked that she had the best drive of any lady he had ever seen. Jill was pleased, but careful not to show it, merely remarking that she probably had a great deal more practice than the average girl.

All the players walked home in a party, and they did not meet again till dinner, when there was little cause to address each other.

But when they reached the ball-room he came and asked for a dance. Jill gave him one near the end, and spent the time meanwhile looking forward to it, though she would not for worlds have acknowledged it. Will Anderson found her decidedly absent-minded. He asked her if she were tired, and she seemed quite vexed at the mere suggestion. He looked unhappy, so she hastened to cheer him, asking him how he and Mabel had progressed at golf. Then she suddenly launched off into a panegyric of Mabel's charms, and finally flabbergasted him by remarking:

"You ought to marry Mabel, you know, Will. She's just the very girl for you. A little bit too good if anything," slyly, "but much too nice to think so."

Will's brow grew a trifle black, and he gazed moodily at his feet. "I'm just as fond of Mabel as you are," he said, "but I happen to be still fonder of someone else."

"Oh, it's your imagination," said Jill coolly. When she made up her mind about anything, she usually achieved it; and as often as not by sheer daring. She had no definite reason why she particularly wanted Will to marry Mabel, but the idea had taken her fancy, and she knew it would release her from certain qualms of conscience concerning her old admirer, and her beloved brothers' hopes. When Will looked up in dumb surprise, she only regarded him with a pair of half-laughing, half-serious eyes, and resting her hand a moment on his arm, said winningly: "I'm awfully fond of you, Will, and I adore Mabel. I want you both to be ever so happy, and I'm sure that's the simplest way."

"But my dear girl," he began remonstratingly.

"No, don't," she interrupted gaily, "just think it over."

"I absolutely refuse," he exclaimed stoutly. "Do you think I'm going to wait all this time and never so much as say a word? I want to marry you, and no one else; that's straight enough, isn't it?"

"Yes, but you're so rash, Will," soothingly, "we're not really a bit suited to each other."

Will got up looking a little stern.

"It is not a subject I care to speak lightly about," he said.

But she easily made him sit down again and listen to her. In the end, she made him understand clearly that it was no good going on waiting for her, and then, because he was very miserable, she chatted to him hopefully, and finally handed him over to Mabel, remarking that he had a bad headache and did not want to have to bother to talk to strangers.

Mabel smiled kindly and suggested refreshments, afterwards winning his gratitude by talking of Jill and then his friend Hall, so that when the dance was

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over he was not nearly so wretched as he expected to be.

Meanwhile, Jill, after one sudden gulp of appreciation at her sense of freedom, gradually fell once more into the restless, unsettled state. She did not know why, and she felt very impatient with herself.

Her programme was as full as she wanted it; a convenient pier-glass told her that she was looking her best, and she could not fail to observe certain pairs of admiring eyes turned in her direction.

As the time wore on and the fifteenth dance approached, she cheered a little, and at the last became almost nervously excited. She knew that Hall was the best waltzer in the room, and she was eager for their dance. That was how she accounted to herself for her rising spirits, in spite of her avowed aversion to the man himself. When he approached her he looked grave, but remarkably calm. Apparently the similar expectation, which he was quite as entitled to, did not affect him. As they danced, neither talked much, the pleasure of the perfect motion was too delicious in itself. Afterwards, they sat down a little apart, and then, for some extraordinary reason, and perhaps for the first time in her life, Jill lost her self-assurance.

She could neither talk naturally, nor appear perfectly at ease, and the galling consciousness of it only increased her discomfort. Hall could not make her out, as she had always appeared to him the personification of life and spirits. He supposed she was still at enmity with him, and was surprised, after their pleasant golfing in the afternoon. He regarded her covertly with a keen, critical glance. He decided she was very pretty, perhaps as pretty as any girl he knew, and he thought she looked nice, too. He decided Anderson was rather a lucky fellow, and determined to try and make peace with her definitely, and pave the way for a pleasant friendship on Will's account.

"I hope you are not going to nurse your resentment indefinitely," he said presently. "I'll apologise for my rudeness, if that will make any difference."

Jill was taken by surprise, and hardly knew what to say.

"I thought we had mutually agreed to forget after this afternoon," she ventured, a little nervously.

"I hoped so," quietly.

He was studying some of the promenaders, and she turned to take a quick glance at his face. She thought it was a very strong one, and was glad that he wanted to be friends.

"That was my idea about it," she answered. "I am seldom angry for long. I get worked up at first, but it soon blows over. I admit I was pretty wild with you in the beginning," she added with a touch of her usual brightness.

"I know you were," he answered with a little smile. "I thought you were going to throw that shilling at me."

Jill laughed. "I wanted to badly," she said.

"I know you did. I can't think how you managed to refrain. I believe I had a vague feeling of relief that you wanted your tea too much to waste it."

The music struck up then, and they were obliged to rise.

"I suppose you haven't a dance left?" he queried.

"Yes, I think I have. I never quite fill my programme if I can help it at these impromptu dances."

"May I see it?" and he held out his hand. The two last spaces were vacant.

"Will you give me both as a token of forgiveness?" he asked.

Jill assented with a mischievous little smile, and suddenly all her moodiness vanished.

They enjoyed their two dances immensely, and sat chatting when the programme was finished.

"I hope we shall pull the match off to-morrow," he said, as they parted.

"Yes—rather!" she replied readily, "I think we stand a very good chance."

* * * * * *

"Yes," was his mental verdict the last thing, "Anderson is a lucky chap. He always was."

Then he fell into a sound sleep, and never stirred till he was called in the morning.

Jill would gladly have done likewise; but, instead, she tossed about half the night, and was only able to drop off to sleep when it was nearly time to get up. But she was willing enough to rise even then, for the golf match was before her, and the day full of joyful promise.

They won triumphantly, and carried off the prize in high glee, so far as Jill was concerned. Everything had gone well for both of them. The match had caused them to spend most of the day together, and though Anderson looked on moodily, neither of them took any notice.

Hall felt a trifle conscience-stricken, but he did not see that it was his fault; and decided, as he was leaving early the next day, it didn't matter, and Will could easily make up in the evening.

With this thought in his mind, he only asked for three dances, although her programme was, as yet, a blank, and Jill felt a chill of disappointment. There was not much etiquette observed on a last night like that, and she knew that many pairs would have as many as five together. She knew also that he had three with two other girls, besides an interval to smoke, and could

He took her to a small alcove and sat down beside her.

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therefore easily have given her another without it seeming noticeable.

The first of their three passed very naturally; they danced it through without stopping, and then went to have refreshments. It did not quite come up to Jill's expectations, however, for though Hall was exceedingly

"Hi! wait a minute! You've got the wrong lady."

nice, he was very much the casual friend. So she looked forward to their last two still more eagerly, wondering how and where he would suggest meeting her again.

He was waiting about for her some little time before the dance began, and her heart beat quickly when he was at last able to come and claim her, and she saw a suggestion of glad expectancy in his eyes. When they sat out, however, he was very quiet and scarcely spoke at all, so that it was almost a relief to continue dancing, and her heart sank very low.

Afterwards he took her to a small alcove and sat down beside her. He bent forward and rested his arms across his knees, looking down with knitted brows at his hands. Jill leant back wearily and fidgeted nervously with her fan, for the silence grew constrained. She had never known a man to turn his back on her in this way before, or indeed do anything but show his pleasure at the chance of having a merry *tête-à-tête* with her. The whole situation was new to her, she could not even talk herself, and yet she liked him better, and was more anxious to please him, than anyone she had ever known. She raised her eyes and looked at him longingly—everything about him suggested strength—strength of mind, purpose, and body; it was easy to forgive him his unconventional lack of politeness.

"I suppose you are really going to-morrow?" she said at last.

"Yes, very early, before anyone is up. It is quite time too."

"Don't you like hydros?" quietly.

"I have always detested them, but I have enjoyed myself here."

"Then why are you glad to go?"

"I don't know that I am. I only know that I must."

He sat up and tucked his hands in his pockets, but he still looked away from her, with a cloud on his face.

"I wonder if we shall ever meet again?" she ventured.

"Oh, sure to," was the rather callous-sounding answer. "I go to see Anderson at Shrewsbury sometimes; it's a very good bicycle ride. I hope we shall get another game of golf together some day."

Jill did not reply, but lowered her eyes to her fan and a little, tired droop lingered about her mouth.

Hall turned his head without her knowing and watched her a few moments. He thought she had never looked so entirely winsome and charming before.

Then suddenly he got up.

"Shall we look for the others?" he said abruptly.

She rose, and with a slightly cold and formal air took his proffered arm. A merry group in the hall hailed them gladly, and they were quickly separated among the others.

When everyone prepared to say "good-night" he sought her again. "I must say 'good-bye' now," he said, "as I shall not see you to-morrow."

"Good-bye," she answered quietly. "I hope you will try our Shrewsbury links some day."

When she and Mabel were alone she tried to chat briskly of the day's doings; but when they were both in bed and the light out, she lay staring blankly into the blackness about her.

"I wish I had never met him," she said, with clenched hands, struggling to keep back the tears. "I was so happy before, and now everything is spoilt. How can I ever get through weeks of dances and gaieties without him?"

She bit her teeth together hard.

"How can I ever get through the long years without him?" she finished.

* * * * *

When Ted Hall got into the homeward-bound train the next morning, he was, if anything, more depressed than when he had started the previous week.

"I was a fool to go," was his mental comment. "I might have known something would go wrong," by which it will be seen that a new grievance had been added to the rest, to vex his already over-wrought soul.

"I won't see her again until they're married," he finally concluded, "and then it will be different, but I wish I had never gone. It was just my luck to meet her, too late to even have a chance."

* * * * *

"Hullo! glad to see you're still alive," and Will Anderson vaulted a low gate, and crossed a lawn to where Hall was idly lounging with a cigar in his mouth. "Four whole blessed months, and never a word of you! You might have vanished off the face of the earth for all I could tell. What on earth have you been doing?"

"Busy," was the cool answer; "awfully glad to see

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you, though. Come into the house, old chap. Have a brandy and soda and help yourself," throwing his cigar-case on the table.

"You must be coining money, you beggar," said Will. "I wish you'd teach me the trick."

"I should need to get up early to teach you anything," Ted replied laughingly. "Had a gay winter?"

"Yes, all right. Things went a bit wrong at Christmas, but they've cheered up since. I've come over to tell you a piece of news and be congratulated."

"So I imagined. I'll get a bottle of champagne and we'll drink good luck to you."

"Who on earth told you?" exclaimed Will, in amazement. "I only knew myself the day before yesterday."

"A little bird and this," tapping his forehead as he went indoors.

He caught his foot in the carpet, and nearly fell headlong, which caused him to mutter a short but expressive monosyllable, all the stronger because of his suddenly disturbed state of mind.

"I knew it would come; what a fool I am to care!" he muttered angrily, as he descended the cellar steps, glad of an excuse to get away and overcome the first shock of the news. "But she was so different to the rest."

When he had filled their glasses, he raised his, and said, with assumed cheerfulness:

"Here we go, then! A long life and wedded bliss to my old friend Will and his charming *fiancée*, Miss Haslam."

"Hi! wait a minute!" exclaimed Will hastily, but laughing in spite of himself; "you've got the wrong lady."

Hall stared at him, thunderstruck.

"You don't mean——" he began at last.

"Yes, but I do, my dear fellow," jovially; "Jill and I decided we weren't very well suited. She told me I should be much happier with Miss Hayward, and, right or wrong, I'm happier than I ever was in my life before. So start again, old man, and give me my own mate this me."

When Hall had overcome the shock of the news, he again raised his glass, and the second toast was noticeably warmer than the first.

"It was at Christmas, you know," Will went on. "I hoped to get engaged to Jill then, but she was awfully sensible about it, she always is. I felt very down on my luck for a time, but Mabel turned out a brick, and now I wouldn't give her up for anyone in the wide world. I'm awfully happy, old man—ever so happy—take my tip and get engaged."

Hall smoked on silently for a few moments.

"I understood at Christmas that Miss Haslam was already privately engaged to you," he said at last.

"Oh, no, she wasn't, but it was a near thing."

A sudden light broke in upon Will, and he looked up sharply.

"If you hadn't thought that?" he began.

"But I did think it, so never mind," put in Hall.

"But I do mind. By Jove! this is grand, I see it all now; couldn't make you out before."

Hall tried to stop him, but he was incorrigible, and raising his glass exclaimed, "Go in and win, old fellow, here's good luck to you. She's one of the prettiest and nicest girls in the county, and Mabel Hayward is the other."

"You are jumping to conclusions very hastily," Hall said a little coldly. "Miss Haslam and I are mere acquaintances at present."

"Rats! I know better. Why, we haven't any of us known what to make of Jill, she's been so quiet this winter. And all the years I've known you, you've never gone four months without coming over before. You must come back with me to-night for a few days and make up for lost time. There's no atom of use in waiting."

Hall quite agreed with him, and before the week was over, a great health-drinking and congratulating took place one evening in Shrewsbury.

The four happy recipients of the honours finished up with a quiet ten minutes in the hall together, when Will remarked, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes:

"By Jove! but it was a near thing all round, wasn't it?"

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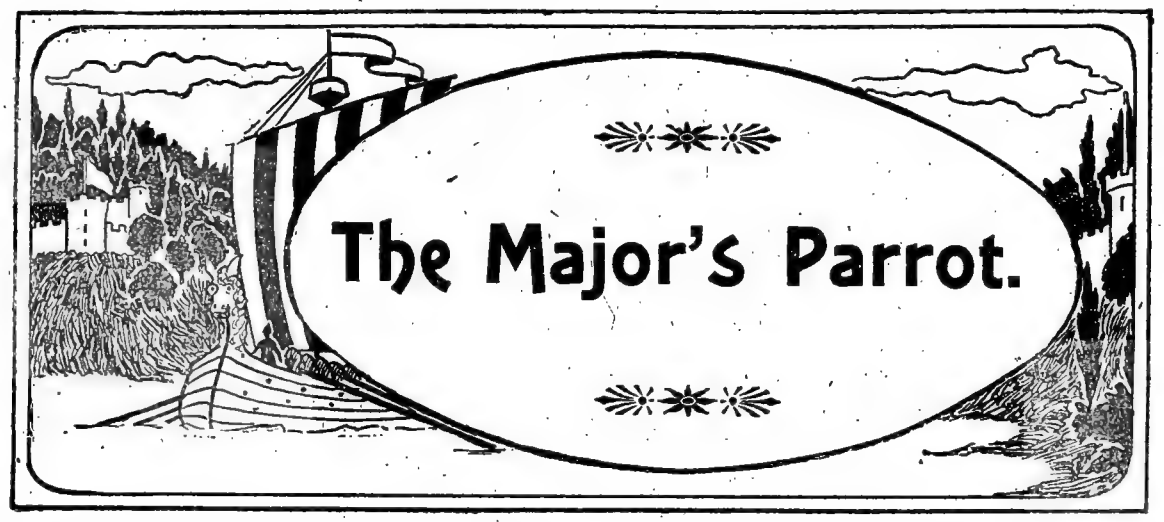

The Major's Parrot.

WEI-HAI-WEI is going to become the fashionable summer resort in the Far East, so some people say. In the winter it is a dreadful wilderness, great blocks of ice, and cold, biting winds. It is late before the snow disappears, and the many spring flowers kept warm beneath it begin to show their gay little heads. Then the breezes blow soft from the summer sea, the wonderful blue of the Far Eastern blue sky is unclouded with grey, the officers of the Chinese regiment feel themselves once more within reach of the world, a few more troops come over from Hong Kong, and Wei-hai-wei becomes frivolously frisky.

Already little bungalows, in a row, each with its small garden, have sprung up on the sea-front, and the proprietor of the one hotel is dreaming of electric light and telephones. The men of the Chinese regiment are tall, finely-made men and look very neat in their smart uniform. Their pig-tails are wound up and tucked away under their service caps or helmets, they march well and they are not at all a bad imitation of our old acquaintance, Tommy Atkins.

The inhabitants of Wei-hai-wei talk of the "season" as a solid fact, and really a good many people from Hong Kong and Shanghai have begun to go there, though neither Cook nor Gaze yet condescend to number it among their cheap excursions or conducted tours.

Last year, a major in the Army Service Corps, quartered at Hong Kong, decided to spend his leave at Wei-hai-wei; firstly, because he had not enough money to take him home; secondly, because it would seriously decrease his small remaining amount of funds, even if he only went so far as Japan; thirdly, because Wei-hai-wei was said to be very cheap; fourthly and lastly and chiefly, because a lady, on whom Major Roslyn had long cast a covetous eye, had announced her intention of passing the hot months of the summer at this new resort.

The lady was called Miss Sophia Mac Tavish, she had come out from Scotland to adorn the home of her brother, a merchant in Hong Kong; but the brother was wickedly ungrateful, he did not appreciate the presence or the outspoken counsels of his elderly sister, and, adding insult to injury, had married two months before our story opens, a poor, pretty Irish governess.

When the engagement was announced to Miss Sophia, she stiffened her virtuous backbone in speechless wrath—she said nothing at all. Mr. Mac Tavish was pleased at this and thought, poor man, that his family affairs would arrange themselves peacefully. He proceeded to propound his plans for re-furnishing his bungalow for his bride. But he was not allowed to talk for long.

"Alexander," said Miss Mac Tavish, in a voice that caused the very flies to shiver, "whatever may be your plans for the reception of this godless and forward person, you need not repeat them to me. You have had an opportunity vouchsafed to few, of hearing the words of truth, and of associating with an unblemished member of the Scottish Church. If from this you can turn away, and lower yourself to the company of a low class Papist, all I can say is, I wash my hands of you, Alexander, from this day forth."

So she washed her hands of Alexander, for he showed no signs of turning from the pleasant paths, that diverged from the Scottish Church—and led to the Irish governess.

Miss Mac Tavish had a substantial income of her own, she was by no means dependent on her brother, report gave her eight hundred pounds a year, but report doubled the facts, as it often does.

She removed herself from the desecrated home of the Hong Kong Mac Tavish, appropriately named. Braemar, and she took rooms on the second floor of the Grand Hotel, which, as everybody knows, stands on the wide road bordering the harbour and looks straight across to Kowloon.

Here she found it very dull; very few of the friends she had made as mistress of her brother's house, came to see her in the hotel. She had made the acquaintance of Major Roslyn some time before and looked upon him with mild approval.

I scarcely like to say it of so discreet an elderly maiden, but in her own mind, she had settled to marry him if possible; to bestow her fortune, her counsels, her severe grace of religious character, on a mere follower of an unhallowed profession. The truth was, she did not wish to return to Dundee, like a cask of undesired goods; she had gathered from Major Roslyn's conversation that he was not too well off, though she did not know he had absolutely nothing but his pay, and many debts besides.

But lately, the Major's attentions had fallen off in a very marked way! Why was this? The truth was, he

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had had a small remittance from home, so he enjoyed himself and put off the evil day. He had a sort of vague idea that Miss Mac Tavish was the evil day—he did not wish to lose the chance of a joint partnership in a possible eight hundred a year, but he felt that his outlook must be black indeed, before he could put up with Miss Sophia. So he trod the primrose ways of dalliance, and enjoyed himself very much so long as his money lasted.

But it soon went, alas, and not only did it vanish away, but quarter-day arrived, and with it a pile of bills. Two days before, Miss Sophia had asked him tenderly where he meant to spend his leave, and had quite casually said that she herself was going to Wei-hai-wei. The Major had given some indefinite answer then; but now, when his servant, Ah Chung, brought in this little array of blue long-shaped envelopes with his early tea, (one looked extraordinarily like a summons), Major Roslyn made up his mind at once.

To Wei-hai-wei, he would also go. He told Ah Chung to pack up while he had breakfast. Ah Chung was never discomposed, and proceeded to the next room at once, to begin.

"I'll take the parrot, too," called out the Major through the folding doors.

"Yessir," said Ah Chung, but he shook his fist at the parrot's cage and murmured under his breath, "Bird of Satan, accursed one."

The parrot surveyed him quietly and seemed to wink. It was a new purchase of the Major's and showed an unusual aptitude for talking. Also it seemed to understand the meaning of remarks made to it, in a wonderful way. The Major called it Nebuchadnezzar; it was a grey parrot with red tail-feathers.

Nebuchadnezzar was not always quiet under Ah Chung's insults; on the contrary, he often commenced the fray by calling Ah Chung, "Son of a pig." On other days he would only look at Ah Chung gravely, and solemnly wink with enjoyment at having betrayed his immovable enemy to a show of resentment.

Ah Chung would have liked to drop the cage with the parrot in it, to the bottom of the China sea; but this he did not dare to do. On the voyage to Wei-hai-wei, Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed himself very much and learnt several new and choice expressions from the sailors. One peculiarity he had, that the Major could not cure him of, he would not speak a single word if any woman were near; he would chatter away to the Major or any other man, but as soon as a woman approached he would stop, fluff out his feathers angrily, and no inducement could make him speak another word.

After a few days of fine weather, they encountered a moderate typhoon, the sea rose mountains high and flung the ship first on one side and then on the other, down, down so low, it seemed as if she could never recover herself. Nebuchadnezzar clung wildly to the sides of his cage and his language left nothing to be desired, from a sea-sick person's point of view. But they soon got out of the choppy white-crested waves, and as they got under the lee of the land, near Wei-hai-wei, the sea became beautifully calm and blue. The newly-made forts gleamed white on the grey rocks.

First, on landing, the Major went to the hotel, but it was not very comfortable and it was expensive; so, as he had three months leave, he thought it better to look out for lodgings. He was recommended to try the row of bungalows, I have before mentioned, on the sea-shore.

After dinner one evening, he walked down there, and as they were practically the only houses to be let in the place, he was scarcely surprised to see Miss Sophia Mac Tavish emerging from the gate of one. He lifted his hat and greeted her civilly. Miss Sophia simpered; her charms then had drawn the Major so quickly after her!

"Let me see, he must have started within a day or two after I left Hong Kong," she said to herself.

Still his manner was not so warm as one might have expected. She entered into the question of lodgings with much interest and strongly recommended the row of little bungalows by the sea. She herself was installed in one, and she believed the one next door to hers was to let. They inspected it together. Two sitting-rooms on the ground floor, a wide verandah looking to the sea, and above, two large bedrooms and another verandah. What could be better? The rent, too, was very moderate and included necessary plate and linen.

So Major Roslyn took it, and the next day moved down from the hotel, accompanied by Ah Chung and Nebuchadnezzar. Ah Chung speedily found a Chinese cook, and the household was then complete.

The Major passed his time very comfortably, he often dined at the fort, or at the Chinese regiment's mess, of which he was made an honorary member, on other nights a man, or sometimes two men, dined with him.

Then he had Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he talked a great deal. The bird would sit on the arm of his chair with a very human expression in its wicked round eye, nodding its head and exclaiming at intervals, while its master detailed his grievances.

It was a funny thing to do with a parrot, but it was a great relief to Major Roslyn; his creditors were becoming unpleasantly pressing and the shadow of Miss Sophia loomed darkly on his mental horizon. So he told Nebuchadnezzar all his worries, and that wise bird croaked sympathetically, and would hop from the chair to his shoulder, and rub his head thoughtfully against the Major's face.

Ah Chung used to hear the talking, and became more firmly convinced than ever, that the parrot's body was the abode of an evil spirit. Next door nothing could be heard, for each bungalow stood in its own garden.

So two months passed, and Miss Sophia was by no means pleased with the state of affairs. Major Roslyn's attitude towards her was no more definite than in Hong Kong; true, he often accompanied her on her evening walks and had adopted an air of proprietorship when arranging her shawl, brought as a defence against the night air; but this was not enough

Could it be?—and Miss Mac Tavish shuddered with horror at the thought—could it be that he was trifling with her elderly affections, that he had no serious intentions at all? It required the whole strength of a mind endowed by the wisdom of the Scottish Church, to bear up against such treachery.

No, it could not be! Perhaps he was shy, poor man!—he certainly was a little younger than herself.

That was it, he was diffident, no doubt—a charming trait in these days of unblushing effrontery. So Miss Sophia redoubled her smiles and leant more tenderly on the Major's arm as they returned from their evening stroll.

"Do you know, dear Major," she murmured softly, "I have never inspected the interior of your charming bungalow since you have come to live there. I should so much like to," she insisted with childish grace."

The Major shuddered.

"I am afraid I have no lady to receive you," he said rather grumpily, "and I'm afraid a bachelor's quarters are, hm—hm——"

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"Oh, not at all, dear Major," insisted Miss Sophia, gushingly, "I adore simplicity, and anywhere you live, must gain interest in my eyes."

"Good gracious," said the Major to himself, "I must be careful, by Jove."

Aloud he said:

"My dear Miss Mac Tavish, you are too kind. If you really will excuse my deficiencies, I shall be only too happy if you will honour me by coming to tea one day this week."

"How delightful," cried Miss Sophia, "you dear man, indeed I will come. Shall we say Saturday, at four o'clock?"

"That will suit me capitally," said the Major, "I will expect you then, at four o'clock."

They had now reached the lady's garden gate and stopped to say "Good-night." She pressed his hand lingeringly, and turned, with an audible sigh, up the path to the house. Poor old thing, she was very lonely, you know.

That night the Major dined alone, with only the society of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he confided the singularly pressing state of his affairs. He sat for a long time on the verandah after dinner, with the parrot on his shoulder, and felt as if he were really talking to a friend.

Ah Chung received notice of the entertainment, and the feast was prepared, also the Major invited three extra people, a naval lieutenant and a captain in the Chinese Regiment with his wife. Fruit and cakes, and tea and cream, all were set out invitingly on little tables in Ah Chung's best style; the chairs were dusted, the wood polished, everything wore a festal air.

It was a remarkably fine day, so the long windows were wide open on to the verandah, and the fresh sea-breeze blew crisply in.

At four o'clock, the guests began to arrive—the naval lieutenant first, then Captain and Mrs. Venner, last but not least, Miss Sophia Mac Tavish. She swept in, arrayed in her best visiting clothes, a good and solid grey silk poplin, white China crape shawl, and a most festive-looking pink bonnet.

Poor Mrs. Venner sat appalled by such magnificence, she had on only a white shirt, a blue skirt, and sailor hat. Miss Sophia was gracious but distinctly patronising; in fact she was dreadful altogether, her host felt it more than all.

Nebuchadnezzar looked on with distinct disapproval. Why were all these people eating here? while he was offered nothing, and, an additional insult, even shut up in his cage. He was very rarely so now, but the Major was afraid he might fly at his guests, as two of them were women.

Nebuchadnezzar hated women, as I have said before.

Mrs. Venner said: "What a nice parrot you have, Major Roslyn, does he talk? Pretty Polly!" and she held out to him a piece of cake.

Nebuchadnezzar turned his back on her with scorn, Major Roslyn laughed.

"I'm afraid he'll have nothing to say to you, Mrs. Venner," he said. "Nebuchadnezzar hates ladies and will never say a word while any are in the room. I'm afraid I spoil him; I've got into the habit of talking to him in the evening as if he were a friend, a regular old bachelor's habit, and he seems to understand all I say."

"You call him Nebuchadnezzar?" said Miss Mac Tavish sternly, "do you not think it irreligious to give such a name to a heathen bird?"

Nebuchadnezzar's eye had been for some seconds fixed on Miss Mac Tavish's pink bonnet, and when she spoke in her usual rather grating voice, he gave a start, then he ran up and down his perch and gave a preliminary croak.

"Oh, hush, hush," cried Mrs. Venner eagerly, "he's just going to speak," and Nebuchadnezzar spoke with clear and awful distinctness.

"If somebody doesn't pay my debts soon," he said plainly, "I shall have to marry that infernal old woman next door."

Then he was silent, but he had said enough.

The Major's face was scarlet, the naval lieutenant was purple as if with apoplexy.

Miss Mac Tavish rose from her seat, she fixed her eyes on the Major's guilty countenance—then without a word she did the only thing possible, she rustled out of the room, her very poplin skirt seeming to shake off the dust of such society.

So she went, and the others were too taken aback with astonishment even to open the door. As she went through it, the Major sprang forward, but she waved him back with gesture worthy of a Bernhardt.

In the room she left there was an awkward silence; then all the others rose simultaneously to say "Good-bye."

The Major shook hands mechanically, then through the window he watched them going through the garden, simply doubled up.

"I can never show my face in Wei-hai-wei again," he said to himself.

Then he looked at the friend who had betrayed him and laughed bitterly.

Nebuchadnezzar winked in a confiding way.

"You have ruined me," said the Major with angry reproach.

"Just my beastly luck," said Nebuchadnezzar.

Sadi Grant.

Mrs. Greene: "Charles, I was astonished at the way you devoured that salad to-night. You know you always said you detested salad."

Mr. Green: "Yes, love, but I didn't know that there was another way of making it than yours."

"Great heavens, man!" exclaimed Bogg's old friend. "Do I find you reduced to playing a cornet at the street corner to make a living?"

"I ain't doing this to make a living. My wife won't let me practise in the house," Boggs replied.

Uncle Jack returns from a long walk, and, being somewhat thirsty, drinks from a tumbler he finds on the table.

Enter his little niece, Alice, who instantly sets up a cry of despair.

Uncle Jack: "What's the matter, Allie?"

Alice (weeping): "You've drinked up my 'quarium, and you've swallowed my free pollywogs."

A gentleman touring in Scotland happened to be in the bar of a wayside inn partaking of some refreshment. While proceeding to light his pipe he was about to use a wax-light out of his box, when an old Scot, who was having his "half," handed him the box of matches lying on the counter, saying:

"Dinna use yer ain, maister; hae these—it's the only discount ye get in a public-hoose."

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THE LION'S WARS

I.—THE NETHERLANDS WAR.

1793—1795.

CONSIDERING how universally we have been reviled on the Continent for our selfishness and rapacity, it is nothing less than astonishing that we should have allowed ourselves to be persuaded into joining the confederacy which sprang into existence against France after the death of Louis XVI, especially as no arguments derived from the balance of power could be invoked to defend the policy we adopted.

The execution of the French king no doubt excited the deepest indignation in this country, but that was no reason why we should join other Powers in depriving France of her conquests, especially as the dismemberment of France would not have enriched us.

Yet on March 25th, 1793, we signed a convention with Russia for the prosecution of hostilities against the French until they should relinquish all their conquests. As soon as it transpired that Britain was to play its old familiar *rôle* of plucking the chestnuts, the great Continental powers expressed their willingness to shed the blood of their soldiers in the cause of punishing revolutionary France, provided we paid the expenses.

Having worked themselves into a state of high moral fever, they also declared that as Britain would provide the sinews of war, it was only fair that she should be allowed to control its operations.

As we were to pay all expenses, the allies of course furnished extremely large armies.

Austro-Sardinia provided 55,000, the Spaniards 50,000, the Austrians 66,000 on the Lower Rhine, and 33,000 more between Meuse and Moselle, and there were 112,000 Russians and Prussians on the Middle Rhine.

In 1794, Pitt stated in the House of Commons that His Britannic Majesty had agreed to pay the Emperor William of Prussia £50,000 to enable him to carry on the war, with an additional £100,000 per month for forage, £400,000 cash down to put the army in motion, and £100,000 on its return.

As these sums proved insufficient we actually agreed to pay all expenses Prussia incurred provided reliable vouchers were produced. Needless to say this proviso caused no difficulty, Germans supplying Germans led to our being beguiled out of some sixty millions before the war was over.

War being declared, a British force under the youthful Duke of York sailed for the Netherlands and, landing, joined the Hanoverians. On the 7th of May, 1793, we quitted our cantonments near Tournay and marched to Maulde, a village in Belgium, where some Prussians and Austrians were posted.

To make head against her foes the French Convention had ordered a levy of 300,000 men, so there was a goodly array of Frenchmen at St. Amand on the Scheldt when we attacked. The Prussians on our left, after some hours of fighting, became so hardly pressed that the Duke of York had to send the Guards to their assistance.

The Duke of York was not a great strategist, but, accustomed to the atmosphere of courts, he was not unacquainted with the gentle art of flattery. On arriving

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at the point where the Prussians were being badly cut up, the Duke said. "I reserve for the Coldstream Guards the honour, the special glory of dislodging the French from the intrenchments our allies have failed to carry. As British troops you have only to show yourselves here and the French will retire."

Tommy must have liked this style of oratory for it is said that he loudly cheered His Royal Highness. But perhaps the words were not ill chosen, for the position was so strong as to require a supreme effort to capture it. To get at the French it was necessary to negotiate a ditch which was found to be so broad that they were compelled to use the village bridge. This exposed them to a most destructive artillery fire. Although we lost half our men we fared better than the Prussians. They, too, lost half their force and at the finish had to retreat, whereas we manaed to get to the other side.

But the French were too strongly posted to permit of their intrenchments being stormed, although we made several desperate efforts to capture them. One headlong charge brought us within twenty yards of our goal. But we were driven back, the fire being too heavy. The night was closing in when we retreated. The French contemplated harassing our rear but a sharp repulse caused them to change their minds.

The French claim St. Amand as a decisive victory, which is strange considering that, shortly after, Conde was blockaded.

Before we could attack Valenciennes it was necessary to reduce the fortified camp at Famars. The French offered a desperate resistance, but the Austrians, coming up, a redoubt was captured, Famars fell and Valenciennes was beseiged. The siege operations were intrusted to the Duke of York, who used his artillery with such effect that half the town was destroyed before it surrendered.

Before the town capitulated the French people were desirous of making peace, but they rallied as one man the moment they learnt that the Duke of York had taken possession in the name of the Emperor of Germany.

The siege over, the Duke of York marched to the assistance of the Dutch, who had been driven by the French from Lincelles. The 1st Coldstreams, and the 3rd Guards were sent forward, but the Dutch, having retreated, the British, in their hurry to bring them back, took the wrong road, and presently found themselves confronted by a large French army.

General Lake at once prepared to retire, greatly to the disgust of our men who clamoured to be led against their old antagonists. So the orders were countermanded and Lake, sending word to the Duke of York to hurry up reinforcements, boldly attacked the French. The Dutch onslaught had been so lacking in fire and determination, that the French reckoned on an easy victory.

In fact, they burst out laughing, when the puny proportions of our force were revealed on its coming into the open. But their mirth was not of long duration. They purposely allowed us to approach within twenty yards in order to surround and capture the entire force, but before they could extend their lines, we had dashed into their midst.

The charge threw them into the greatest disorder. The centre was cut in two, one half being hurled against the left wing, and the other being precipitated on the right.

The French officers made frantic efforts to reform their men, but our soldiers rushed up and down the columns with such intrepidity that at last the French became thoroughly frightened and bolted from the field. We took two stands of colours and captured all the guns the runaways had taken from the Dutch. This battle is worth recalling if only on account of the gallantry exhibited by the regiments of Guards who to this day carry Lincelles on their colours.

Early in 1794 we again took the field, on coming out of our winter-quarters, against the French. Our neighbours have never liked us. To the French revolutionists we were especially objectionable. In 1794 their hatred led them to promulgate the following order:

"England is capable," ran this precious document, "of every outrage on humanity and every crime towards the Republic."

After enjoining the commanders of their forces to destroy the wounded, and shoot all prisoners, it closed with these remarkable words: "Shoot the British slaves and Europe will be free."

Whether the French thought it probable that any attempt to carry out these infamous orders would lead to reprisals, it is impossible to say, so it must be set down to the credit of the French generals, that they disregarded the barbarous edict of the Republic. The Duke in a counter-order reminded the men "that mercy to the wounded was the brightest gem in the character of the soldier."

In the campaign of 1794, the allied generals again demonstrated their incapacity by so dividing their forces that it was impossible to strike a decided blow anywhere.

The French, as was their wont, took up positions in the neighbourhood of woods, which served the double purpose of concealing their numbers and securing a safe retreat.

We managed to drive them from an intrenched position close to Landrecies, which we were besieging, but the success was temporary, for three days later they drove back the Prince of Coburg with great loss.

Encouraged by this success the French then boldly attacked the Austrians, and, knowing the value of concentration, brought such huge numbers to bear on the enemy that victory would have been certain had not Sir Robert Lauri and a brigade of cavalry taken them in flank and forced them to retire.

This audacious movement on our part so enraged the French that, reinforcements arriving, they were able to concentrate a most imposing force at Cambay. Their chances too, which suffered nothing from the vigour and initiative they displayed, were still further increased by the bickerings of the allies. The only subject on which the allies were unanimous throughout the war was that Britain was not being bled sufficiently.

The French having completed their preparations for a big coup, crossed the Selle at Saalzoir. The Duke of York sent orders to General Otto and his division to attack. Otto reconnoitred, and, finding the enemy stronger than he expected sent for reinforcements; but as the messenger lost his way, Otto had next morning to assault a force far exceeding his own in numbers.

Why the French did not attack would be inexplicable save for the circumstance that they (except at Waterloo and one or two other battles) invariably acted on the defensive when encountering us. They never hesitated to advance against any of the armies of the Continental Powers, but with us they preferred, as a rule, the shelter of the trenches.

For all his deficiency in numbers, Otto managed by repeated charges of cavalry to drive back his antagonists.

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[Lawson Wood.

Drawn by

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One of these onslaughts resulted in our capturing eight pieces of cannon. Maddened by this reverse the French made a supreme effort and recaptured five. It was an expensive attempt for it cost them two whole battalions.

The courage displayed by the 15th Hussars at this battle won even the admiration of our allies, greatly as they disliked us. In 1800 the Emperor of Germany (the head of the Austrian Empire) sent through the Earl of Minto, Minister at Vienna, the Cross of the Order of Maria Theresa to Colonel Aylett and seven other officers for the gallantry they had displayed.

But the French were far from being dismayed by what they had undergone at the hands of General Otto. A few days later they furiously assailed the whole of the Duke of York's force. They did their very best to win, for that sinister body in Paris, the Committee of Public Safety, had intimated that any further reverses would be treated as crimes. General Chapius suggested waiting, but the Committee would not listen, so he attacked with his entire force, consisting of 3,000 cavalry, 25,000 infantry, and 75 pieces of cannon. One division of 10,000 men was sent to Ligny, where it attacked the redoubt at Troisvilles defended by Colonel Congreve. The second column was marched to Beausois, but fear of the Committee proved too strong, so it wheeled about and rejoined its companions.

General Otto, who had been carefully watching the disposition of the French, having ascertained that their flank, which rested on the village of Caudry, was only defended by 2,000 infantry and 500 dragoons and six guns, decided to fall on this weak wing with his horse.

General Mausel with 1,450 British cavalry, a division of Austrian cuirassiers, and a body of the Archduke Ferdinand's Hussars, bore down like a torrent on the village of Caudry.

After slaughtering the small force in charge, the British turned their attention to the main body of the French army.

Mauser rifles and quick-firing guns were unknown in those days, the sword being the usual weapon. It did rare execution amongst the serried ranks of the French that day. General Chapius sent down a regiment of Carbineers to check our progress.

The Austrian horse hung back, but the British, shaking themselves clear of the French foot, went pell-mell at the French horse and sent them flying.

This battle seems to have consisted of nothing but charges.

The rashness we displayed was so supremely ridiculous that the French would most certainly have annihilated us had they retained their presence of mind.

After disposing of the Carbineers our men descried some cannon posted on an eminence. There were fourteen fully-manned guns confronting us and the road to these led across a ravine exposed to a murderous fire. The Austrians were asked to join, but pleaded that their horses were tired.

So the British went alone. They trotted in open order till the ravine was cleared, then they closed their files and broke into a canter.

Although the French were firing grape we made straight for the guns; a good many saddles were emptied during that memorable ride, but not a single artilleryman escaped alive.

This decided the day.

The victory was greatly magnified in this country. The *Evening Mail* of May 14th gravely asserted that the French lost in killed alone 14,000 men, which is hardly likely. Fifty pieces of artillery were captured, of which forty were claimed by us.

Had the Duke of York brought his infantry up, we should probably have captured the entire French Army.

Whatever may have been the merits of the Duke of York as a strategist, he had none of the dulness so often found in the Georges. To stimulate the prowess of his men in the battle of Caudry he offered prizes in money for all munitions captured. In a General Order dated May 12, 1794, the following sums were offered for captures. "For each cannon or howitzer £20. For each pair of colours £10. For each tumbril £10. For each horse (alive) £12." No wonder the Duke was known in the army as the "Soldier's Friend."

On May 18, 1794, the Duke of York was surrounded at Turcoine by large bodies of French. Our men offered a desperate resistance, but they somehow got so muddled up that even a charge was impossible. The consequence was that French took 1,500 prisoners and guns. Badly as we were handled the capture of our artillery cost the assailants 4,000 men.

Our brave fellows retrieved this disaster a few days after at Pont-a-chin, where Pichegru, the French commander, after declaring that our repeated victories over the armies of France had been owing to a foolish superstition, scorned a defensive battle, and fell on us with a splendidly equipped army of 100,000 men. In this battle the Duke of York had insisted that the allies should do their fair share of fighting.

To their credit be it recorded that the Prussians and some of the Austrians fought well from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. After this they began to waver.

The Duke, seeing this, sent up some British infantry.

Our men only fired one volley and then rushed forward, never stopping until they landed in the middle of the enormous French army. Nothing more was seen of them for half-an-hour. The flight of the French at length revealed them.

They were guarding fifty pieces of cannon they had captured, in the hopes that the prizes which had been given for war material would be continued.

At this time the Reign of Terror was in full force, and Europe shuddered at what would happen if the power of France were not quickly checked.

On the approach of winter the French entered Amsterdam, and, the Zuyder Zee being frozen over, the singular spectacle was presented of a fleet being captured by a land force.

The Duke of York, having to return to England, had handed over the army to General Walmoden who, on the advance of the French, retreated to Westphalia.

The public at home now clamoured for the recall of the army, which, coming to the ears of the allies, led to their perpetrating the most shameful barbarities on our sick and wounded. Those of our men, and alas! they were but few, who had borne up against the rigour of the winter, kept our friends at bay till we reached Bremen, whence in March, 1795, the troops sailed for England.

The war of the Netherlands is not one we have any reason to be proud of, although we did nearly all the fighting.

Some of the battles fought in this war showed the British soldier at his best; but we could not prevent the endless quarrelling which went on amongst the allies. It was internal dissension which eventually led to the triumph of the French.

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Mr. Bowser's Tribulations.

XXXI.—HE LEVELLED ALL DISTINCTIONS, AND A TRAMP LEVELLED HIM.

Mr. Bowser had come home not exactly mad, but he was in that state of mind known as "techy." He found Mrs. Bowser so pleasant, the dinner so good and the house looking so well that he couldn't find fault with anything until he sat down to his evening paper.

He hadn't been reading more than five minutes when he burst out with:

"By George, I have always said it would come to this, and here it is!"

"Has another king been assassinated?" asked Mrs. Bowser without much interest.

"No, there hasn't, but there has been something nearly as bad. Just listen to this: A millionaire who got on a 'bus for a short ride found himself alongside one of his employés. What do you suppose he did?"

"Bowed to him and offered to pay his fare probably."

"He did, eh? That's all you know about it. It so happens that he called the conductor and had the employé put off. He said he didn't propose to ride along with the riff-raff. My goodness, how I'd like to have been there! Because the man had accumulated a few thousand pounds he looked upon common humanity as so much dirt. He wouldn't even ride with a man who had to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow."

"It was silly for him to make such an exhibition of himself," said Mrs. Bowser, "but there is no call for you to get a stroke of apoplexy over it."

"But don't you see all this helps to preserve the aristocracy in this country—don't you see it?" he shouted as he waved the paper on high and brought the cat out from under the sofa to see what the row was about.

"Well, what of it? Why should you care?"

"I care because all men were born free and equal; because one man is as good as another; because money don't make the man. That's what ails the poor man to-day. We are trying to class him with the animals of the field. It's this shoddy aristocracy drawing its skirts away from the labouring man that makes socialists and anarchists. Because we happen to have a few thousand pounds in the bank are we better than our washerwoman or the man who clears away the rubbish?"

"I haven't heard of your inviting them to dinner or sitting down to tell stories."

"Then, by thunder, you will, and this very night too!" he roared as he kicked over a chair and started to stamp about. "The people of this country want to know who are the snobs. I'll soon prove to which class I belong!"

He started for the front hall and had his hat on before Mrs. Bowser could ask him what he was going to do. Without replying to the question he passed out of doors, and from the parlour window she saw him halting by the gate and gaze earnestly up the road.

"My friend, you are a man."

He didn't have to wait there long. A tramp who had been loafing at the corner and accosting a score of persons in vain for money to get a bed soon came shuffling along. He was debating whether to ask or not when Mr. Bowser observed:

"My friend, you are a man."

"I expect I am," was the reply.

"And as a man you are just as good as I am. Because I happen to be better off in this world's goods than you are I have no right to look down on you."

"Say, old man," remarked the tramp as a grin spread over his face, "unless you are drunk you are talking uncommon good sense. I like to hear it."

"I am neither drunk nor a snob," continued Mr. Bowser. "I say you are a man born free and equal. As a man, you are entitled to my respect, whether you are a millionaire or a labouring man."

"And you don't set yourself up as being above me?"

"No, sir."

"And I'm as good as you are?"

"Just as good."

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There was a row in which the dining-room was almost wrecked.

"Shake hands, old man! You don't know how you encourage me. If I'm as good as you are, then mebbe—mebbe——"

"Come in and have dinner, and after that we'll talk. There'll be no aristocracy in this country soon if a man of my size can prevent it."

"You ain't goin' to git me in there to give me the boot?" asked the tramp as he hung back and wondered over his good luck.

"I am going to treat you as an equal. Come along."

The man was taken to the dining-room and the cook ordered to give him his dinner. She looked in wonder and astonishment and demurred, but Mr. Bowser insisted, and she reluctantly complied.

When the fellow had got well to work, Mr. Bowser went upstairs to explain what he had done and what was to follow, but Mrs. Bowser had gone to her room. He was minded to call her down and ask her to play the piano, but on second thoughts he decided not to rush the business too much at first.

After twenty minutes he went down, but the tramp was still going strong with knife and fork. He had asked for something to wash it down, and the cook had put on a bottle of claret, with which he was making free. Mr. Bowser winced a little, but gave him a quarter of an hour more.

At the end of that time there was still a piece of the second loaf of bread left, and it was about ten minutes more before the tramp had finished. A cask of food and a bottle of wine had restored the gall of the "equal" to its pristine glory, and shoving back from the table at last with a sigh of contentment, he pounded on the board with his knife and called to the girl:

"Hey, slavey, bring hither one of the old man's perfectos and let the wrapper be speckled!"

"How dare you talk that way to me?" demanded the indignant cook.

"A perfecto, pot wrestler, or out you go!"

Mr. Bowser heard from the head of the stairs, and his hair began to rise.

Running down, he said:

"Look here, ain't you rather over-doing this thing?"

"Not at all, old bird," was the smiling reply. "We are both men and equals. You have the splosh and I'm dead broke. It's your business to divide. How are you situated for cash?"

"I'll show you how I'm situated. There is the door! I want no more of your society!"

"But you can't turn me off that way old man—oh, no! My name is Jim the Sticker. When I gets a good thing, I hangs on. Don't go back on what you said about all men being equal."

Mr. Bowser again ordered him out, but as he refused to go he was taken hold of to be assisted.

He didn't propose to drop the equality business without a struggle, and there was a row in which the dining-room was almost wrecked and Mr. Bowser was badly knocked about.

By the time the cook had brought a policeman and Mrs. Bowser and the cat had got down stairs the tramp had filled his pockets with knives, forks and spoons and got away. Nothing could be said to the man left lying on the floor on his back. He had levelled all distinctions and been levelled himself.

M. Quad.

[Next Week.—*He Does a Bit of House-cleaning while Mrs. Bowser is Away.*]

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PAST THE POST.

"I TELL you the beast must be pulled!"

The slightly-built man, who looked little more than a lad, fixed a pair of sad, hollow eyes upon the ground between the pointed toes of his boots, and listened to his companion's imperious directions in mute despair.

"It's done every day for much less than this affair means to either you or me," the other urged. "It means beggary to me and prison to you if the beast get's home. If it doesn't, you shall have that unfortunate cheque together with a hundred pound note the evening following."

"I never pulled a mount yet, Mr. Hall, and I'm hanged if I do now," the jockey ejaculated through his set teeth.

"It will mean prison for you, then."

"I dare say it will," cried the jockey in a shrill voice. "You kept that cheque until you knew it was too late for me to prove I didn't forge it, and now you come and threaten me with it unless I do your dirty work. I won't do it, prison or no prison, so I tell you straight; Besides, who told you I'm riding Merrymay?"

"Do you take me for a mole?" said Mr. Hall. "I know you have been asked to ride the beast, and if you refuse or fail to pull him—well, you know how unpleasant will be the consequences."

"I suppose you've got on to The Baker for all you're worth," Sillings said thoughtfully.

"That's none of your business. The Baker's got to win, that's all you need worry about, and if you pull Merrymay, all will be well."

"For you—yes: I don't doubt it. But what about Lord Shannon? P'r'aps you don't know that he backed my mount for all he's worth, and that Merrymay is relied upon to pay off the mortgage on his estate? A win to The Baker would be absolute ruin to his lordship."

"More fool he! I can't be expected to drop all my money because a friend has backed the horse to win. Now look here, Joe; don't let us have any more words about the matter. Will you or will you not ride and pull?"

"No."

"Tut! Confound you! What do you think Miss Mastman will say when you're thrown into gaol, and branded a felon? What will she say when she knows that you have been courting her with the crime of a forgery upon your conscience, such a high-minded young woman as she, too?"

"She'd think less bad of me than if I pulled Merrymay," Sillings returned in a hushed voice.

"Well, put it another way. How can you marry her after three or four years in prison? You may not get 'beefy' in gaol, but your skill will be spoilt, your name will be ruined, your career, which at present promises to carry you into the first rank of jockeys, will be cut short. In a word, you will be hopelessly ruined!"

"Surely the Prince of Tempters might come to you for hints!" the jockey hissed. "But even if Merrymay loses, The Baker may not win. He may go all wrong within the next three days. Then where will you be?"

"Fool! I have not backed The Baker; I have laid against Merrymay. If The Baker turns up fit on the course, then I may back him. But that is quite beside the point."

There, apparently, was Joe Sillings' last hope gone. No compromise between him and his tempter was possible. He had to choose between prison and ruins the loss of the girl he loved and degradation in her eye, which was perhaps even worse than losing her, and the mere tightening of a rein.

"Which will you do?"

"I'll think it over, and you shall see," the jockey replied weakly.

"Can't you decide now? Think what 'No' means to you."

"Can't you decide in your own mind what I shall do when the time comes?" Sillings replied doggedly.

"Yes, I think I can, Joe," said Mr. Hall, smiling quietly. "You're a wise man, Joe. The *pros* are out of all proportion to the *cons*."

"Have you anything else to say?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then get out of my paddock, Cuthbert Hall."

Mr. Hall knew he had succeeded in his mission, and therefore took this insult with better temper than he would otherwise have done.

He went away without a word, but with a smiling face and a light heart.

Sillings watched him disappear, and groaned.

He was in the hollow of the man's hand, and how could he surrender a successful career, a life's possibilities and a life's love to race-course ethics. Yet was it merely a question of race-course ethics? Was it not rather an ephemeral effort which would be reflected by his conscience through all his life; an effort which would ruin many a home, and wreck many a life?

On the other hand there was no certainty in horse-racing and those men who had backed, or would back, Merrymay to win knew they might lose; and if he

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pulled the horse, and the world knew why, would not his reason justify him before all except those who had lost by this act?

He wandered through his stables, his heart lonely and sick within him, debating with himself which course he should take; and it suddenly occurred to him that if he could discover the whereabouts of his old friend, John Grainger, all would yet be well; John could prove that he never committed the forgery.

But where was John? Perhaps a thousand miles away, perhaps in the very next town. He had not heard anything of him for three years, and knew no one who had. John might be dead. Still there was hope in this idea. He would endeavour to find John before the day of the race, and if he failed—then, he would have to choose.

* * * * *

Late in the evening of the following day Cuthbert Hall was hurrying about his chambers in Sloane Street, preparing everything so far as he could to enable him to get down to Epsom early, without the necessity for rising before his usually late hour.

He was in high feather, flushed and not absolutely sober. He was looking for the morrow as a day that would see his making, a day of events which would wipe out his financial difficulties and put a handsome fortune in his pocket, and a day too which would ruin for ever the chances of his friend Lord Shannon redeeming his fortune sufficiently to marry Clair Dudley.

Mr. Hall was not the man to play half any game; he laid a plot to enrich himself, and developed it to ruin his rival. He had schemed for months to reach these ends, and he had omitted nothing which could further either object.

He had even forged a note to meet a creditor, whom he could easily have paid, to husband for a day or two a few hundred pounds which he would lay to his own gain. Then he would redeem the note, he decided, and wipe the matter out.

It was all planned to the finest point, and he was naturally elated. It was the honey of satisfaction to him to prepare for the eventful morrow.

At last when all seemed done, he paused and pondered to know if there were nothing else he could do to anticipate the next day. Then he sat down at his writing table, and took a cash-box from a drawer. From the cash-box he extracted a folded cheque.

He satisfied himself that it was the one he wanted, took a sheet of plain note-paper and, pinning the cheque to it, wrote, "The B.N. follows to-morrow." He folded the two up, slipped them into an envelope which he closed, addressed and stamped.

"He shall have the hundred to-morrow," he said, glancing down at the letter upon the blotting pad, as he rose and lit a cigarette; "meanwhile I can make four or five of it. I will take this with me, post it at the station on my return to town, and he will see I am a man who keeps his word in either way."

He smoked the cigarette half through in restless meditation, and, then, as if struck by a sudden thought, went out of the room, picked up a hat and stick from the hall rack, and passed out of the building.

He had not been gone three minutes, when his man entered the room. His heavy eyes wandered over the room from one object to another until they rested upon the letter.

Picking it up, he read the superscription apathetically, and he glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf.

"Juggins!" he muttered calmly. "I thought he was a bit wavey to-night. Two minutes to twelve. I can just catch it, and if I don't, I suppose I shall catch it—in another way."

Reluctant to cross the muddy road in his indoor shoes, he made a detour to a crossing and posted the letter at the box opposite the chamber buildings. He returned by way of the crossing, availed himself of the lift and entered the flat just behind his master who had used the staircase.

"Been out, Pink?" Mr. Hall inquired.

"Posted your letter, sir."

"Posted—my—! You blithering idiot!" cried the master, white with fear and rage. "Where did you post it?"

Pink told him and followed him down the stairs, three steps at a time, and across the road.

With fumbling fingers, Mr. Hall struck a match and looked at the little enamelled plate which indicated the time the box would next be cleared.

"Eight-twenty! The box is cleared. Oh, you vast fool!" he cried, turning passionately upon Pink.

He sprang into a hansom and drove to the district sorting office, with all possible haste.

"By mistake a few minutes ago my man posted a letter in the pillar-box at Camden Street corner," he said to an official who came forward. "It is of vital importance that it should not be delivered. It was addressed to Mr. Joseph Sillings, Darcy Lodge, Epsom. The box has been cleared."

"Are you sure it was posted?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I cannot help you; once posted the letter belongs to the Postmaster-General until it is delivered at the address of the addressee."

"But I must have it, man!"

"Out of the question, sir."

It was useless to argue; the official was obdurate.

"What time will it be delivered?" Hall asked anxiously.

"Epsom, you say? Between eleven and twelve—about eleven."

And Joe Sillings would not be on the course until one or two o'clock! He would probably get the letter before leaving home. Why, in that case, should he pull Merrymay?

Hall strode out of the office in a frenzy of rage and despair.

Somehow he must draw Sillings away from his house before the letter arrived there and keep the letter from him till after the race. But how?

"Pink," he said, when he had got back to his chambers, "I want you to send a telegram for me."

"Sillings, Epsom. Meet me Leatherhead Station eleven sharp, Wednesday. Important. John Grainger," was how he worded the message.

"That will draw him if nothing else will," Hall said, as he affixed a sixpenny stamp.

But even when this was posted he was uneasy in his mind; he knew Sillings would be at Leatherhead Station at the time appointed, that he would wait anxiously for the appearance of Grainger, and that the chances were a thousand to one against Sillings returning home before the race was run.

But there was the bare chance that the prematurely-posted letter would get to Sillings' hands in some way before Merrymay was paraded, and Hall could do nothing to obviate this contingency.

Next morning, however, refreshed by sleep and no

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longer muddled by drink, Hall was perfectly sanguine. On his way down to Epsom, he had sent a telegram to Sillings' head groom to ask where his master was, and at Epsom telegraph office he found awaiting him a reply to the effect that Sillings had gone early to Leatherhead to meet a friend.

This was good news indeed, but opened an ugly doubt for Hall.

Sillings' groom was almost certain to attend the race, and the letter must already have arrived at Darcy Lodge; and might not the groom take it to his master? It was a torturous doubt.

By chance, however, Hall met the groom just outside Epsom station, and satisfied himself that the man had not brought the letter, which had not arrived when Sillings left home, and that no one else was coming from Darcy Lodge to the meeting.

Lounging about the paddock some considerable time later, Hall caught sight of Sillings out of the corners of his eyes.

The jockey's face was pale and haggard, and there was a hard, sad look about his mouth.

"What a fool the man is," Hall said to himself. "One would imagine he was required to do murder."

Shortly afterwards Merrymay passed by where Hall was standing. Sillings was up in his purple and white silk.

Instinctively he turned his head, and as he caught sight of Hall, he gave him a look of mute despair. But Hall did not see it.

He was running his eye over The Baker and admiring the horse's wonderful condition, which so impressed him that he moved off and laid every penny he had with him upon the animal.

By the time he had edged himself into a good position for viewing the race the starters were already off. He could just make out the coloured jackets of the jockeys bobbing along in the distance.

The Baker was third to get off and Merrymay was running in a batch of five of the field behind the first three.

"How-d'ye-do, sir," said a voice over Hall's shoulder.

Hall turned and blanched as he recognised the sunburnt chubby face of John Grainger.

He could find no words to speak in his surprise and alarm.

Fate was surely trying to unhinge his mind; first by the hideous mistake about the letter, and now by John Grainger, the vanished man, turned up at such a time. If he had seen Sillings the day was lost, the lifetime ruined!

"I only arrived from South America last night, sir, but seeing my old friend Joe Sillings was up on a favourite in the big race I was bound to come down." Grainger explained.

"Have you seen Sillings?" Hall inquired hoarsely.

"Not to speak to, but I've put a pony on his mount, you may be sure."

Hall turned his head away and shuddered. Fate had played a waiting game with him, he thought, but luck was all on his side.

There, behind him, breathing in his very ear was the one man on earth, who, by a few moments conversation with Sillings, could have ruined his masterly schemes, and snatched Sillings out of his net; and he had come too late.

Twice in twenty-four hours Hall had been in an ace of ruin, and had been saved by chance.

There was a roar, and a pushing forward of the crowds that lined the course, as the horses swerved round the bend and began to come down the straight.

"Marcus!" reared half the crowd, "Haresfoot!" yelled the other half as two horses broke from the leading five and challenged each other.

There was a panting pause, then a roar that made the blood tingle in Hall's flushed cheek.

"The Baker!" shouted the crowd together, as another horse overtook Marcus and Haresfoot and showed them his heels.

A moment later a fluttering patch of white and purple seemed to leap forward.

It flashed past Marcus and Haresfoot, and began to overhaul The Baker.

"Merrymay does it! Merrymay!"

Inch by inch Merrymay drew down upon The Baker. The shadow of the favourite's nose flickered on The Baker's thigh, then upon its flank, ribs and shoulder, and then The Baker's nose began to fall back from the level of Merrymay's shoulder, to its thigh; when suddenly Merrymay seemed to pick himself up and leap forward a hundred yards—two hundred yards, and Merrymay had won.

* * * * *

Half-an-hour later Hall, white, haggard, and aged by many a year, too desperate to hurry from the scene of his ruin without an understanding with Sillings, met the jockey face to face.

Sillings was no less pale and hardly less haggard than Hall, but there was a triumphant light in his face which was naturally wanting in Hall's.

"You blackguard!" Hall hissed, half-raising his stick.

"You can't honestly call me that," said Sillings quietly. "Not now, at least; I've given all my world to keep faith with Merrymay's backers, and I gave you the chance to hedge. I know what it means to me—ruin, unless I can find John Grainger."

"To hedge?" Hall ejaculated.

"Aye; I sent you a telegram to tell you that Merrymay was not as fit as might be, but if the horse could win he should."

Hall turned and slunk away.

He crept to the station, into a train. He crawled to his chambers by back streets to avoid meeting acquaintances.

Pink greeted him.

"There's a telegram for you, sir," said Pink. "It came a few minutes after you'd gone."

Hall snatched it up and read:

"Merrymay none too fit. But if can win shall.—Sillings."

Hall groaned.

* * * * *

At precisely the same moment Sillings at Darcy Lodge was burning a cheque he had found waiting him.

He watched it crumble away in the flames, and smiled up at John Grainger who stood by, watching him.

C. Randolph-Lichfield.

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The Strange Case of Hedley Vicars.

If one looks down upon a peaceful valley, where a blue wreath of smoke curls upwards from some quiet homestead, and notes the tranquility, the air of repose which surrounds the dwelling, it is hard to realise that under such a roof there may be lives that jar, aching hearts, hatred and discord.

And yet such is not infrequently the case.

So, too, is it in the lives of some of those around us. Outwardly they may appear calm and unruffled, yet, unsuspected by their closest friends, a consuming fire may be raging within.

The ever-present, torturing memory of some dark tragedy in the past is often cloaked from the world under a smiling exterior.

Some such reflections as these always come uppermost in my mind when I think of the strange case of Hedley Vicars.

Few knew Vicars as well as I did; fewer still had the remotest suspicion that there was any hidden mystery in his life. To have even hinted at the possibility of such a thing would doubtless have provoked an incredulous laugh, for he was one of those men upon whom fortune had showered her favours with a lavish hand.

A bachelor with an income that ran well into four figures, devoid of extravagant tastes, his lot was one which most people would have envied.

If you add to this that he was in full enjoyment of vigorous health—a fine specimen of an athlete, in point of fact—good-tempered, generous, and popular with his fellows, there seemed to be no room in his life for care of any kind.

Though he had abundant opportunities of doing so, Vicars was not the man to make many friends.

Indeed, even among those who knew him best, close intimacy was out of the question. He held you at arm's length at first, and it was only by slow degrees that you succeeded in penetrating his reserve. Even then there was a point at which you were brought up as by a dead wall.

What lay beyond, what thoughts or memories were stored in that hidden quarter, none could tell. In his company, when I had got to know him pretty well, an irksome sense of that impassable barrier in his nature was ever present to my mind.

There were two rather singular points about him which often puzzled me. The slightest approach to inquisitiveness regarding himself or his affairs aroused in him a repelling coldness of manner, that plainly showed the subject was one upon which he permitted no idle curiosity.

Then, if you happened to be with him in public, he had a strange way of whisking round suddenly and peering into the crowd behind him, as if he recognised the tones of some particular voice.

Moreover, though he had a fine musical ear, a woman's singing, no matter how enthralling to others, seemed to jar upon him as if it were nothing but a medley of harsh and discordant notes.

It was in the summer of '92 that a curious incident of this kind occurred. Vicars had a houseboat on the Thames, which he was wont to inhabit for a month or two every year.

I had run down from town to spend the week-end with him, and talk over a contemplated trip up the Nile during the coming autumn.

One evening we were lounging along the banks of the river in our flannels. The splash and ripple of the stream, the drowsy hum of insects, and the imperceptible shading away of day into night produced a quietude of mind, a tendency to meditation, that such scenes alone can evoke. That peculiar fresh-water smell was in the air; occasionally a skiff glided by with a scarcely audible sound of oars, or a distant peal of laughter came from some merry boating party.

Vicars was strolling along slightly in advance of me. Suddenly, to my surprise, I saw him stop short in the midst of a stride, turn his head towards the river, and appear to listen with the utmost intentness. I paused—held my breath for a moment—but all I could hear were the faint, far-off strains of a woman's voice, which were wafted down to us through the still, hot air.

I stepped up to my companion and looked at him. I was so little prepared for what I saw that it struck home to me like a shock. Even in the waning light I could see that his face was ghastly white. His eyes were fixed in a wild, unearthly stare, and his whole aspect that of a man stricken by some sudden and appalling terror.

"Good Heavens! Vicars, what is the matter?" I cried, clutching him by the arm.

Without a word he shook off my hold, swung round on his heel, and was off to the houseboat with long, swinging strides. I followed hastily, but he had disappeared below before I got back. As I stood for a moment on the bank I caught the gleam of light in his room, the window of which was open. Stooping down,

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I glanced inside. Vicars was striding up and down there, swinging his arms about in a wild and frenzied manner, and clapping his hand to his head every few seconds.

I saw no more of him that night.

* * * * * *

Early in the following September we started for Egypt, intending to make a short stay in Cairo before proceeding further upon our journey. It was there that the next scene of this singular drama took place.

We were returning rather late from the house of an English resident, with whom we had become acquainted on board ship.

It was a simply perfect night, I remember—still, sultry, with a brilliant moon riding high in the heavens. The black, sharply-defined shadows of the houses cut across the white glare that flooded the streets.

As we strolled along towards our hotel, puffing our late host's excellent cigars, we both seemed rather disposed to silence. Vicars was strolling on the inside, and I noticed that his eyes were bent thoughtfully on the ground. For myself, the strange jabber and chatter that came from dark corners engrossed most of my attention, and I vainly endeavoured to distinguish the dusky forms of the speakers as we moved past.

At the other side of the street, which was in the shade, an open window, with a glow of light streaming from it, caught my eye. Why I should have noticed it I cannot say, except, perhaps, there might have been some hazy thought floating through my mind as to whether the occupants of that particular house were regular inhabitants of the city, or strangers like ourselves.

As we approached the spot, the mellow chords of some stringed instrument floated out to us through the open window.

The next moment the full, rich, thrilling notes of a woman's voice seemed to fill the deserted street with a burst of melody.

Instinctively I paused to listen, facing round towards the house, and oblivious to all else save the ravishing strains that poured forth into the night.

Never in my life have I listened to such a song! The power, the pathos, the intense and vivid emotion, thrilled to the very depths of my soul. It seemed to lift you out of yourself, to transport, to bear you away to the realms of the spiritual. To this day I have no recollection of the words, but I hung upon every note of the song in breathless ecstasy.

As the voice died away into a low, melancholy cadence, like a parting wail, I suddenly became conscious of a sound behind me as if someone was scratching at the plaster of the wall. With a quick foreboding of something wrong, I turned sharply on my heel. Good Heavens! to my last day I will never forget that sight.

Vicars was leaning back against the wall, his hat and his reeking cigar lying at his feet.

The ghastly look in his eyes was appalling, his ashen features were quivering, and he moaned feebly from time to time as if in the clutch of some overpowering horror. His hands, hanging by his sides, kept clawing spasmodically at the wall, until the tips of his fingers were torn and bleeding.

I sprang towards him, for his body was slowly inclining to one side, and his legs seemed about to fail him.

My touch appeared to galvanize him. He started upright, grabbed me by the arm, and literally dragged me away from the spot. I had barely time to stoop and pick up his hat before we were hurrying off down the street at a rapid pace.

Not until we had turned the corner did he seem to recollect himself. Then he took his hat from my hand, jammed it on his head, and strode off without looking to right or left.

When we got back to the hotel, he parted from me abruptly in the hall, went straight up to his own room, and locked himself in.

All through the night, whenever I awoke—and my rest was by no means tranquil—I heard him pacing his floor.

Not until long after daybreak did that monotonous tramp tramp in the next room cease.

The following morning he came down rather late, his face white and drawn, and a restless, scared look in his eyes. It was plain that he had received a shock the night before, and a bad one too. When I joined him in the hall he was giving instructions to have his luggage dispatched to the Nile steamer forthwith.

"What! tired of Cairo already?" I said, in a bantering tone, for I did not wish him to think I suspected the cause of this sudden departure.

"Yes, sick of it!" he answered, avoiding my eye. "I am off up the Nile. Will you come?"

I saw him stop short, and turn his head towards the river.

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Vicars was leaning back against the wall, his hat and cigar lying at his feet.

"Of course I will," I replied. "I think we have pretty well exhausted the attractions here, and the sooner we hear the roar of the cataracts the better."

Not until we had put a hundred miles or so between us and Cairo did Vicars begin to pluck up heart a little and seem to take any interest in his surroundings.

Still, a marked change had come over him; he was subject to long fits of depression, of brooding melancholy, from which he would start up suddenly, and gaze around him with wild, horror-stricken eyes. It was plain that the old morbid fancy regarding a familiar voice at his elbow was stronger in him than ever.

Sometimes, in the hush of evening, as we sat alone under the awning on deck, he used to jump from his chair, hasten to the side, and stand there in the attitude of one who was straining his ears to catch some distant sound.

"Did you hear anything?" he would ask, in an awed whisper.

"No; not a sound. Did you?"

"I thought—I fancied—it seemed to me as if there was someone singing—over there, on the opposite bank. I could have sworn I recognised the voice, too."

"Imagination, my dear fellow," I answered, dragging him back to his seat. "Pure imagination!"

This sort of thing went on day after day, night after night.

To tell the truth I was by no means sorry when we put about, and headed down stream again.

These strange fancies of Vicars' were rather trying to one's nerves.

A voice—a woman's voice—the same which we had heard in Cairo no doubt—seemed to be perpetually ringing in his ears. It haunted him early and late; it sometimes brought him to my berth in the small hours of the morning with the eager questions, "You heard it? Surely you heard it just now?"

In six weeks, much to my relief, we were back in England.

Upon reaching London I parted from my companion, and saw little of him during the winter months. I rather fancy he was anxious to avoid me, for whenever we met there was a certain constraint on both sides, a consciousness on my part and on his, that the thoughts of each went back to that scene in the moonlit streets of Cairo.

* * * * *

In the following spring, just as I got back from a short trip to the South of France, I was surprised to receive a note from Vicars, begging me to come round to his rooms that evening.

Not having seen or heard of him for months, this sudden summons revived my interest in him, and I began to wonder how he had employed himself in the interval.

Vicars occupied a roomy flat in a quiet West End street. As I knocked at his door that evening, it suddenly occurred to me that if the woman's voice still haunted him, he might possibly have broken down under the strain.

But I was little prepared for the actual reality. As I entered his room I found him stretched upon the couch, hollow-cheeked, shrunken in face and figure, with wild, glittering eyes, and the look of a man who had some abiding horror ever before him; a mere ghost of his former self, in fact.

He greeted me in an abstracted manner, as if his mind were running upon something else, and motioned me to a seat near him. No sooner had I sat down, than he leant towards me and said:

"Fenwick, she is here—in London."

"Who?"

"That woman."

"Whom we heard in Paris?"

"Yes."

He dropped back on his cushions, turned away his head, and groaned aloud.

I was much distressed at his condition, shocked by the terrible change in him, but scarcely knew what to say.

"Fenwick," he went on, presently, facing round towards me again, "I regard you as a friend. That time in Egypt you displayed a consideration, a delicacy of feeling, which I am not likely to forget. If I tell you a strange story, you will, I am sure, keep it strictly to yourself. I *must* open my mind to someone, or this solitary brooding day after day will drive me mad."

He paused, and with a trembling hand wiped the cold moisture from his forehead.

"It is close this evening," he murmured, "and the room seems to be rather stuffy. Would you mind opening the window a little?"

I rose and crossed the room for this purpose. Just as I raised the sash, I happened to glance across the street. On the other side, directly opposite the house, two women were standing, surrounded by a little knot of curious passers-by.

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One, the younger, wore a thick veil, or sort of mask that reached half-way down her face. Her tall, stately form was in striking contrast to the short, squat figure of her companion. Both were gazing up at the window where I stood.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the taller of the two began to sing.

Good Heavens! Was it any wonder that I started? There was no mistaking those clear, rich notes; it was the same voice that I had heard in Cairo!

* * * * *

A shriek from Vicars made me close down the window with a crash and hurry across to his side. He was quivering—gasping—his head rolling from side to side, the frenzy of madness in his eyes. I tried to take his hand, to soothe him, but he waved me back.

"Keep off! Keep off!" he shrieked, flinging his arms into the air. "Don't touch me!"

Glancing helplessly round the room I fortunately discovered a bottle containing an opiate. I measured out a draught, and handed it to Vicars. He swallowed it eagerly.

By this time the singing outside had ceased, and I heard the shuffling of many feet on the pavement as the crowd moved away.

With a weary, long-drawn sigh Vicars closed his eyes, and presently dropped off into a restless, fitful slumber.

Sometimes he woke up with a start, sometimes muttered incoherently about an island, the name of which I could not catch.

I sat with him throughout the greater part of that long tedious night. Day was already breaking when he awoke.

At his request I summoned his servant, who had remained in attendance during the night in an adjoining room.

The man soon had a fire blazing in the grate and got us some strong coffee.

"It was very good of you, Fenwick, to stay with me," said Vicars, when we were alone again. "You deserve my confidence, and you shall have it. Do not disclose my wretched story at present. That is all I ask.

"Some four or five years ago," he went on, "I was wandering about the West Indies. Something—Fate, I suppose—took me out of the beaten track, and I visited several of the smaller islands of the Windward group.

"At one of these—the name does not signify—I made rather a long stay. My headquarters were at a little town on the coast, but I spent most of my time in exploring the interior.

"The luxuriant tropical plants, the rich foliage, and the rare birds that flitted about overhead, all had a charm for me. The solitude was profound; it almost seemed as if no foot but my own was ever planted in those forest depths.

"One day I penetrated further than usual, and got into a thick tangle of giant plants, shrubs, and tall grass. I was pushing my way through this dense growth, when a sound reached my ears which brought me to a dead stop. It was a few stray chords of music, coming somewhere from the other side of the leafy screen which surrounded me.

"I listened intently—breathlessly. The music ceased abruptly; but presently, in the intense stillness a burst of glorious melody was wafted to the spot where I stood.

"A woman was singing—pouring out her whole soul in harmony, it seemed. As I hung upon those entrancing notes, I believe they produced much the same effect upon me as they did upon you in Cairo; for it was the same voice—the same woman.

"When the song ceased I hurried forward, and in a few minutes emerged into an open space. In the centre stood a picturesque little cottage, something after the style of a bungalow, with a verandah running round it. There, reclining gracefully in a wicker chair, was the singer—a beautiful girl, who seemed to typify the warm, rich loveliness of the West Indies.

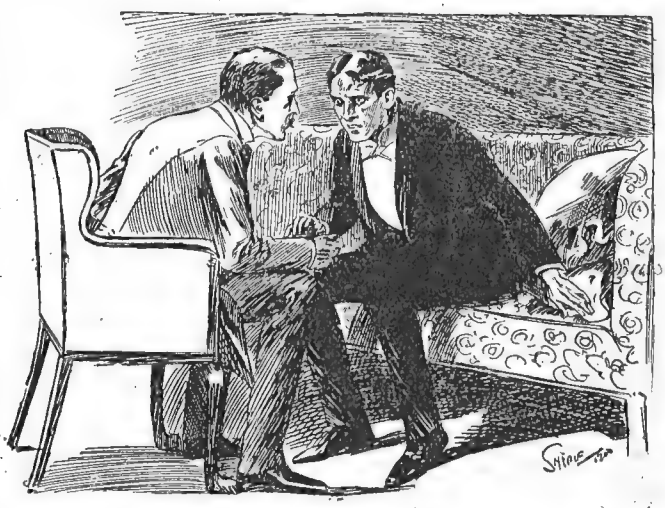
"As she caught sight of me, she sprang to her feet with a startled cry. I stammered out an apology for my intrusion; and by degrees, as if my presence was a welcome break in the monotony of that seclusion, she drifted into conversation. Standing above me on the verandah, her lovely face, and the graceful pose of her figure, formed a charming picture. I noticed that she kept glancing somewhat uneasily into the room behind her, where I fancied I caught the sound of voices.

"From that hour my destiny was sealed. Day after day my steps were directed to this secluded spot. The girl, I found, was a Miss Roupell, the daughter of a wealthy West Indian planter, but now an orphan. The household, so far as I could make out, consisted of herself, one or two negro servants, and a Mrs. Holt, an elderly, taciturn woman, with a face like a rock.

"The few people with whom I had become acquainted on the island could give me little information regarding this Miss Roupell, or why she chose to bury herself in the depths of that solitude.

"That such a lovely creature, who was fitted to shine in any society, should voluntarily lead the life of a recluse, was certainly most strange. Young, accomplished, wealthy, it was difficult to understand why she cut herself off from the world in this way.

"That, however, troubled me little at the time. It was enough for me that she was there. Day after day, week after week, I lounged at her side on the verandah, or we roamed together through the forest shade. Her gentle, loving disposition, her charm of manner, and the



He leant towards me and said: "Fenwick, she is here—in London."

unconscious grace which distinguished her, took my heart captive. I adored—I worshipped her.

"Need I tell you how the matter ended? I lingered on from month to month; and then, one glorious morning, I asked Ina—that was her name—to become my wife.

"Though this could not have come as a surprise to her—she must have anticipated it from my

Standing above me on the verandah, she formed a charming picture.

manner—she appeared startled and troubled nevertheless.

"For several days she would give me no positive answer. She seemed to be struggling with herself, fighting some battle apparently. At last she gave in, and I won her consent.

"But even then there were times when the same troubled, shrinking look returned. It almost seemed as if she felt there was some insuperable barrier between us.

"She had strange fancies, too, in some respects; for instance, whenever I was with her, she appeared always anxious to roam about outside, instead of remaining in the house.

"One evening, when I had set out upon my return to the coast, I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten to give her a trinket, which I had brought with me that day. I hurried back to the house for this purpose. It was already dusk, and a lamp had just been lighted in one of the lower rooms.

"Feeling sure that Ina was there I sprang upon the verandah with the intention of entering through the window and taking her by surprise.

"Just as I set foot upon the verandah, my mind filled with joyful anticipations, there was a scream of rage in the room, a tumult—an uproar and the sound of heavy blows. The whimpering of a woman—evidently one of the negro servants—and her frantic appeals for mercy, thrilled me with horror. I sprang to the window, and I saw—I saw—oh, merciful Heaven!"

He dropped back on his couch, his breath coming in short, quick gasps, his eyeballs distended. I hastened to get him a stimulant. When he had gulped it down he turned to me again.

"Fenwick," he said, "I have been in many strange lands, and have beheld sights that appalled, that shocked me.

"Once, in South America, I stooped down to pick up out of the grass what I imagined to be a beautifully-marked, rounded stone. Before I touched it, it moved; and I saw that it was the head of a deadly, venomous serpent.

"Strange as it may appear, this very incident flashed through my mind as I stood on the verandah, looking into that room. She—that girl—that beautiful creature—was there, but she was transformed into a tigress, a fiend.

"With blazing eyes, her whole form quivering with rage, she held a stick in her hand, which descended again and again with a horrid thud upon the back of an unfortunate negro girl, who was crouching at her feet.

"Appalled—horrified—I stood there, as if my limbs had been robbed of their power. The next moment Mrs. Holt rushed in, flung her arms round the enraged girl, and dragged her from the room. The negress followed, sobbing bitterly.

"How I got away from the house, how I managed to reach the coast, I cannot remember. Early next morning I was on board a vessel bound for Porto Rico, and from there made the best of my way back to England.

"A year passed. The remembrance of that last dreadful scene I had witnessed was fading away when it was suddenly brought back to me with startling vividness.

"One night in passing a house here in the West End I heard a woman singing in a room on the second floor. I stopped—gasped—and reeled against the area railings. It was her voice!

"Since then it has haunted me. In Brussels, in Venice, in Rome, I have heard it. Go where I might, there was no escape from it. At the very moment that I deemed myself most secure it suddenly burst upon me. On each occasion it brought vividly before me that whole ghastly tragedy in my life; my love for that girl, the happy dream in which I had indulged, and the awful awakening. The thought of it all went through me like a knife.

"From time to time, too, I have received warning from her, all to the same effect. Letters, containing a

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ingle slip of paper, have constantly reached me. On hat slip, these words were always written:

The end is not yet.—I. R.

"And now, in face of it all, I ask myself—what will the end be? How, and when, will it come?"

Poor fellow! he little knew how near it was—on his very threshold, as it were. I left him, promising to look round again in the evening. When I did so, I was shocked to hear that he was dead. That very afternoon, while his servant was out, someone had entered his room and stabbed him to the heart.

* * * * *

The singular story which I had heard from Vicars' own lips made a profound impression upon me. Many and many a time, in the solitude of my own room, I went over it again.

I tried to piece it together, to weave these disjointed incidents into something tangible and coherent, but without success.

How account for that sudden and extraordinary change in the girl?—that transformation from a gentle and winning creature, such as Vicars described her, into a being of fierce and ungovernable passion, and eventually, as seemed only too probable, into a murdress.

In all probability the connecting link would have been for ever lost to me, but for the fact that, about a year afterwards, a friend of mine, Ronald Farquharson, came home on a trip from the West Indies. I gave him the outlines of poor Vicars' story, and he promised to look into the matter on his return.

Six months later I received the following letter from him:

My Dear Fenwick,—

Since I got back here I have made diligent inquiries regarding the Roupell family, and have picked up one or two rather remarkable facts, which ought to throw some light upon that tragic affair you spoke of when I was in England. The history of these people, so far as I have been able to ascertain it, should make good reading for those who hold to the hereditary theory. Here it is:

Old Anthony Roupell, the planter, was a bad lot by all accounts. Cruel, heartless, vindictive, there were about as many evil passions stored up in the man as it would have been possible to squeeze into any one human being. His wife, strange to say, was the very opposite; a gentle, lovable sort of woman, always doing good in her own quiet way. Anthony spent most of his time in flogging and ill-treating his niggers; his wife in bathing and dressing their wounds when he had done with them.

This ill-assorted couple had two daughters—twins. They were so alike that it was almost impossible to tell them apart. Both were gifted with rare musical talent—sang divinely, I hear. But there the resemblance ended, abruptly and finally. In character and disposition they were as widely separated as the North Pole from the South.

Irene, the elder, took after her father, inherited all his bad passions, and I rather fancy must have picked up one or two more on her own account. Ina, the younger, was simply a reproduction of her mother. A noble, true-hearted girl she was—at least, so I have been told. You should hear the niggers speak of her! They fairly idolized her.

After the death of their parents, Miss Irene began to make things lively all round. One day she set to work with her dagger upon a Creole girl, and that little ebullition of temper got her into trouble. In short, she was compelled to fly. Ina, brave girl as she was, would not desert her—stuck to her through thick and thin.

I have been to the island where they sought refuge. It seems that, soon after their arrival there, the elder sister grew so outrageous that for the most part they were compelled to lock her up in her own room. Probably her evil passions, now that they had no vent, boiled within her to such an extent as to drive her to frenzy.

The people there tell how an Englishman—doubtless your friend Vicars—came along one day, and fell desperately in love with Ina. Poor girl! her heart seems to have gone out to him from the very first. That was the one bright period of her existence, but it was quickly followed by the darkness of despair. His sudden and unaccountable desertion came as a death-blow to her. I verily believe it broke her heart. From that hour she drooped, pined away, and died.

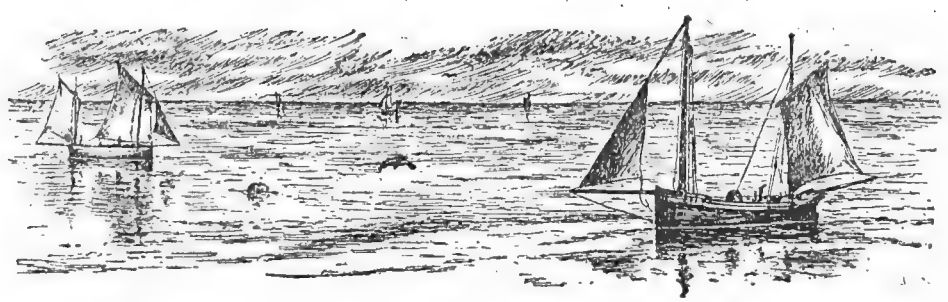
Irene Roupell had one good trait in her character at any rate: that was, a blind and passionate devotion to her younger sister. When she got to know all about Vicars, she vowed to enact a terrible vengeance.

With that purpose in view she controlled herself, curbed her fiery passions, and set out in search of him.

She was accompanied by a woman, an old servant of the family, who was almost as much bent upon the business as the girl herself. You know the rest.

That is the whole of the story. Curious isn't it?

J. L. Hornibrook.



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LOST WORD COMPETITION.

1st Prize, £2 2s. 2nd Prize, £1 1s.
3rd and 4th Prizes, 10s. each.
Ten Consolation Gifts of Penknives.

BELOW is a story from which some of the words are omitted. The words to fill up these blanks will be found represented in the pictures given, and competitors are required to find out the words so as to complete the story.

The above prizes will be awarded to the competitors who send in the correct, or most nearly correct, solutions. In the event of more than one person being absolutely correct, the prize will be divided.

Write the words in tabular form (the number against each) on one side of a sheet of notepaper, together with your name and address, and then cut these pages out and pin all together.

All competitors must enter on the understanding that the Editor's decision is final.

All attempts must arrive not later than Monday, December 31st, in envelopes addressed: "Lost Word, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C."

THOSE in the besieged town who knew him, were convinced that old Jeffrey was alone in the world. Years ago he had taken up his quarters at the (1)——— by the (2)———, and there he had lived the life of a hermit, spending his time chiefly in cultivating the (3)——— for which his abode had become famous.

Not a soul was known to visit him save the (4)——— (5)——— who called him grandfather, and he seldom ventured beyond the (6)———, where he could usually be seen watching his little friends pass to and from (7)——— or (8)———, and making a (9)——— for them to approach him, when he would greet them with endearing words, and pleasant smiles, then throw into their outspread (10)——— the (11)——— which they so much loved.

Among all his pets there were none who had such claim to his affection as a little girl whose name was (12)——, and a (13)——— whose name was (14)———.

These (15)——— were his greatest joy, but above all, the girl, for there was an undescribable something about her face and manner that reminded him of (16)——— who had been more dear to him than all the world, and whom he longed to see again.

But although old Jeffrey had a great trouble at his heart, he would have found solace in his pets were it not for the fact that those cruel days of siege often deprived him of their company.

At times only the most daring would trust themselves in the open, while those more timorous through infancy or age, sought the shelter of a friendly (17)——. And old Jeffrey, not caring to brave the dangers presented by (18)——— and (19)——, deemed it advisable to remain for the most part within (20)———.

Thus it happened that after a day of persistent assault by the enemy, he sat within the (21)——— of his abode tending the (22)——— and (23)——— of a favourite (24)———. The occupation so thoroughly engrossed him that he soon lost thought of the dark (25)——— which hung over the town, its people, and himself. He even forgot the sorrow which had so long been blighting his existence, until, looking up, his eyes rested upon a portrait at the far end of his room.

And as he continued to gaze upon it, tears trickled down his cheeks, while he cried half-aloud, "Mabel! shall I never see you more? Was it not enough that death should rob me of your mother, without my declining years being spent in solitude, to mourn the loss of you, now dead to me, though living?" And, laying his head upon his hands, the old man wept until sleep relieved him of his sorrow, and he slumbered on.

Soon there was a hissing sound, then a loud (26)——, followed by a crash which startled old Jeffrey to wakefulness. He (27)——— hastily, threw aside the (28)——, and looked anxiously out of the (29)———.

A shell had crashed through the roof of an adjoining (30)——, and, satisfied that nothing more serious had happened, he returned to his (31)———, completed his task, and then retired for the night.

It was reported next morning that a twenty-four hours'

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truce had been agreed to by the enemy, and most of the townspeople took advantage of this by indulging in a little out door exercise, of which they were so much in need. The children, too, were about, and old Jeffrey determined to take the opportunity of looking after his many pets.

So with anxious (32)——— he passed through the (33)—— of flowering creepers at his door, afraid each moment to find his garden ruined by the bursting shells that had fallen in close proximity to the cottage during the past few days. But he was delighted to find that all was safe. The (34)——— and even the (35)——— seemed glad at his approach, and while examining some of them, the child who held first place in his heart, came tripping up.

Soon they were sitting side by side under a canopy of fragrant (36)——, the old man looking happy and contented, the child nestling close to him. Suddenly, she looked up at him and said:

"Grandfather!"

"Yes, child."

"She will come to you one day."

He started, for her words brought to mind his reflections of the night before. Then, looking her full in the face, he saw there a vision of his long lost daughter. "Yes! yes!" he cried, "she will come one day to me, I am sure she will."

"Yes, mamma promised me this morning that she would come, for I have so often asked her, and I am sure you will love her, she is so good. But since poor father died she has been sad, so very sad."

When next old Jeffrey looked at her there were tears in his eyes, and the child exclaimed:

"Grandfather, are you ill?"

"No, child; once I had a little one like you, but when grown up, she left me, and I long to have her back again."

"Oh, mamma will do! I'm sure she will, I must bring her to you to-day."

And saying good-bye, she tripped off again.

He followed her along the (37)——, and stood watching till she disappeared behind the hill. Then returning, he seated himself upon a large (38)———, buried his face in his hands, and wept.

There was a sudden flash, a rumbling sound like thunder, then a fierce (39)———, and the old man fell senseless to the ground.

The truce was broken.

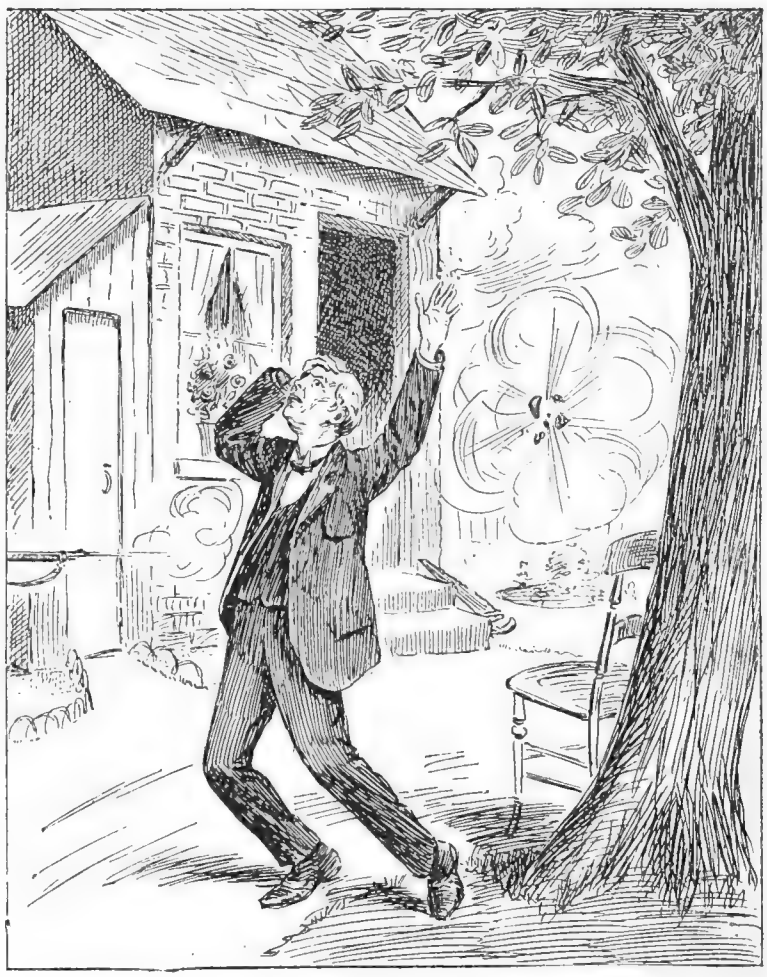
Now, some time after this mishap, a party of school-children returning from an outing, happened to peep into the garden, and were horrified to see "Grandfather" lying there apparently dead. They hurried away to give the alarm, and the news spread rapidly. Assistance was soon obtained, and by willing (40)——— the old man was tenderly lifted from the (41)———, and borne by strong (42)——— into the (43)———.

They laid him on a lounge, and used a soft cushion to (44)——— his head. While (45)——— went in search of a doctor, and another for (46)———, a third endeavoured to revive him with brandy. But he showed no (47)——— of returning consciousness.

At a signal from one of the bystanders, all stood aside, for they evidently (48)—— someone of importance coming. It was a doctor, and following was "Grandfather's" favourite, pulling at her mother's skirts to hasten her on.

"Grandfather, grandfather!" cried the little one, "I have brought her, it is mamma."

But the doctor insisted on seeing the patient before anyone else should approach. And having made an examination, he assured those present that there was no danger. Then leaving instructions, he departed.



The child now rushed to the old man's side, and the mother followed. But no sooner did her eyes rest upon him, than she shrieked out: "Father!" and sank upon her knees before him.

He slowly opened his eyes, a smile lit up his face, and from that moment he revived.

Soon, by careful nursing, his long lost daughter brought him round to full recovery.

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LITTLE QUEEN MAB.

THE stage-manager was in despair; at his wit's end, in fact. Here was Boxing Day within appreciable distance, only a few hours off, and the fairy queen, the topmost glory—actually, not alone figuratively—of the most brilliant transformation-scene his house had ever produced, ill, and likely to be worse.

The original representative of Titania was a clever child, born in the profession. Her appearance might, perhaps, not quite realise one's idea of the light and delicate beauty associated generally with the sovereign lady of the fairies, but as a set-off there was to be considered her undoubted precocity and self-assurance, which made her both "safe" and reliable.

Mr. Lindus knew all this—who better—and groaned in the spirit.

"Tommy," he said to Tom Tolliday, the clown, the morning of Christmas Eve, the two being on the stage watching the test-working of the scenery. "Tommy, whatever am I going to do about supplying Kitty Green's place. I haven't anybody sharp enough to speak the lines or who could be trusted on that top iron in the transformation."

"Yes, it's a nuisance," replied Tommy. "You'll have to find somebody, that's a cert. Wouldn't Mother Finnigan's grand-daughter do?" (Mother Finnigan was the wardrobe-woman.) "She's likely-looking, though she is rather big for the part."

"Big! I should think she was—a tall, gawky, awkward hussy. No, she won't do," and Manager Lindus walked excitedly up and down in front of the "T" piece and muttered strong expressions, not loud but deep.

The pantomime being *Cinderella* it will be quite understood that there was good cause for the manager's tribulations, as the representatives of the fairy queen and fairy godmother were identical.

At the moment when Mr. Lindus had worked himself up to the point of hair-tearing and into a state bordering upon semi-lunacy, something happened. He had turned from the O.P. side to resume his restless "sentry-go" when from the wings opposite a child—she could not have been more than ten—tripped out and across to where the clown, Tommy Tolliday, was standing absorbed in the setting of one of the comic scenes. Always a taciturn man, with no trace in his appearance or manner of the bubbling fun that had made him famous, he seemed more than ordinarily so this morning.

"Daddy!" came in a silvery shout, and echoed clearly across the footlights right through the dreary-looking, deserted theatre. One or two women cleaning at the back of the dress-circle heard it, and stopped to listen for a repetition of it.

Daddy had caught the soft, fair-haired little vision in his arms, smiling over her, and saying such loving "fooleries" that the whole man seemed to be transformed. But the supreme effect of the little lady's unexpected advent was to be seen in the undisguised agitation of Stage-Manager Lindus.

"Tommy, who's the kid? Is she yours? Didn't know you had one; but, then, you're so precious close. She'll do, my boy, she'll do. She shall have anything more a week, in reason, that you like to name."

Tom Tolliday did not respond to this generous offer in the way expected of him. He stood leaning against a "practicable" pillar-box, the child in his arms, her curly head lying on his shoulder.

The other exhibited impatience, at a loss to understand the clown's quiet hesitation.

"Of course you'll let her come. Mark my words, she'll make a big success. I know talent when I see it, at least I ought to."

"No, Lindus, you can't have her. Don't ask me for a reason; I can't tell you anything, for—well, there's nothing to tell. My Queen Mab's a home-girl, isn't she?" he added, patting the child's cheek tenderly, in return for which she raised her head and kissed him again and again until she nearly took his breath away.

"Oh, but I say, Tommy, it's all nonsense, you know. I must have her—I really must. You don't want to 'crab' the show, do you? Well, you will if you don't let me have her for the run of the panto. Don't be an idiot; you'll let her come?"

"No, I tell you. I'm going now. Come on, Queen Mab, I want my dinner. I shall be back in the afternoon to go through that second 'comic' again. So long."

Possibly, but for one of those little things which turn and influence the current of events and the destinies of human life, the pantomime at the Metropolitan Theatre would have been a failure, the run short, and everybody, from manager to call-boy, discontented and disheartened.

"Daddy," said Queen Mab as her father turned to depart, "I'd like to if you'll let me."

"There," triumphantly exclaimed Lindus, "you can't go against that. The child's got more sense than you, Tommy."

The clown looked the little creature wistfully in the face, and said almost in a whisper.

"You wouldn't hurt daddy, would you?"

"No, but I'd be so good if you'd let me—just this once. Will you, daddy dear?"

"If you refuse now after that you're as hard as a stone," said the stage-manager.

"You think so, but I—well, I know more than you, and think differently. Perhaps if I were to give you my reasons for refusing, you'd not press me."

"But you'll not refuse. The child's willing and eager to undertake it, aren't you, my dear?"

"Yes, sir, if daddy'll say yes."

"There, what can you say now?"

"Look here, Lindus, if I consent—and it seems you mean me to whether I will or no—it's but for this once. Never again as I'm a living man."

The clown was evidently so earnest and sincere that Lindus could not but be impressed.

"Very well, that's your business," he said with visible satisfaction. "Only let me have her for this once and the future may take care of itself. Now you must bring her with you this afternoon, and I'll coach her. I'll wager she'll not only be letter-perfect by Thursday, but will do credit in every way to you, to me, and the Metropolitan."

Tom Tolliday was not of the ordinary professional type. A thoughtful man, apart from his stage duties, he took no interest in the chit-chat, the shop-gossip of the theatre. Years before—nearly eleven now—he had married a beautiful girl, a Russian, and a leading coryphée at London's most famous variety house.

Passionately devoted to his wife, she on her part had entered into the contract in that indifferent spirit so

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hard to define yet so common among the denizens of stage-land. It might have been dissimilarity of temper and disposition, or it might have been the difference in their nationality; but, whatever the cause, the fact remained that husband and wife, unsuited, unhappy, agreed to separate. Incompatibility in all sorts of forms furnishes unnumbered instances of the same kind daily, and though Tom Tolliday might have been naturally distressed, seeing that his affection was the greater, there was nothing out of the ordinary in the arrangement.

A few days, however, before she left her home, Tom Tolliday discovered that "La Zareska," as she was professionally known, had never really cared for him, but that she was in some mysterious way linked in with a Russian singer, at that time in London for the Italian Opera season. Three days after the opera shut its doors, and on the fourth Tom had reliable information that his wife, throwing up her engagement at the big house in Dudley Square, had left for St. Petersburg about the same time as the singer aforesaid.

Tom now set himself to forget. He had his little Mabel—his Queen Mab—and the whole soul of the man went out to the child. The two were inseparable except when Tom was at the theatre. There he would not take her, either by day or by night. Too many memories were called into life by any thought of a possibility of Mab's becoming bitten with stage fever. He knew that of course good, true, faithful women abounded in the profession, but Mab with his consent should not adopt it. It might be illogical and unreasonable, but if it rested with him it should not be.

Until that morning, when Queen Mab, against all paternal wish and command, had found her way on to the stage of the Metropolitan, the child had never been inside a theatre, and although Tom was vexed at the breaking through the rule, he could not be angry in the face of her delighted curiosity and eager interest in everything connected with "behind the scenes."

Nobody seemed to know how she got there. The stage-doorkeeper said he never saw her go by him, and that she was a veritable fairy, and had touched him with her wand. Her own account was that she wanted daddy, was tired of being alone, and had asked a nice boy she knew to take her to the door. Once there the rest was easy. Daddy was inside, and with him the danger and the difficulty would be forgotten.

After this things moved forward famously. There was plenty of hard work, and nearly all Christmas Day was occupied in final preparation. Tom's fears were not so much for that part of Mab's performance which would keep her on the floor of the stage; his great anxiety was when, in the transformation scene, the child was perched high up on the topmost point of all, that she might lose her head. The very thought of it made him sick, and he knew that he should have no peace of mind until, the run of the piece over, Queen Mab retired into private life again and resumed her sole position as the light of his heart and home.

Boxing Night, not quite so important a theatrical occasion as of yore, was yet sufficiently so to bring together a big crowd that made the narrow thoroughfare which surrounded the theatre on three sides almost impassable. The doors opened, the pit and gallery were crammed to standing-room point in less than ten minutes. From the latter a sea of closely-packed faces looked down upon nearly empty stalls, while a roar of voices, raised in song, in chaff, and in altogether deafening if indistinct conversation, testified to the lung power at least of the play-going plebs.

From the first everything went splendidly. Little Mab made a wonderfully effective fairy godmother, and spoke her lines with a distinctness that carried them to the rearmost seat of the great gallery. As fairy queen she was equally successful, and more than one impressionable schoolboy lost his heart that night to the golden-haired child actress.

At last the transformation scene was in sight, and behind the gauze clouds the clown, in all the glory of bismuth and vermilion, was testing the strength of the iron frame that in less than five minutes was to support his darling. All seemed right, and Tom descended to floor level again, took the dainty little figure in his arms, and held her until the signal for placing her on the frame.

The signal given, he placed her tenderly and carefully in the cradle, and saw her ready for hoisting to her dizzy elevation. The clouds rolled up and away, and as section after section of the beautiful spectacle was disclosed the applause increased with each development. Then from behind a glittering bed of golden lilies and rose-pink flowers of fairyland rose the figure of the queen of this garden of beauty.

Tom, ready to bound on to the stage with the traditional salutation, watched the gradual elevation of the child. She smiled delightedly as if thoroughly enjoying her position as the cynosure of all eyes. A crash from the orchestra, a sudden jerk as the frame reached its limit, a child's shrill shriek, followed by a man's cry of despairing horror, and down through the crowd of suspended fairies, down through flowers and lights and canvas clouds, fell like a heavy snowflake a little mingled mass of muslin and soft white flesh.

When Stage-Manager Lindus saw poor Tom on one knee, with the form of Queen Mab on the other, he bitterly reproached himself for his own part in persuading to that which had brought about so great a calamity and so great a sorrow for the unhappy father.

She was alive, but neither moaned nor moved. "Alas, poor Yorick!" Tom, the hot tears coursing down his painted cheeks, at last gently raised her and carried her out.

It was impossible to prevent the thing from becoming known to the audience, who, the curtain being dropped and a brief official explanation being made, quickly dispersed.

* * * * *

Far away from the atmosphere of London theatrical life, in a quite country place not many miles from a great Midland town, there live a happy couple, happy because between them reigns perfect love.

On fair, sunny days in summer, when the hedgerows are gay with leaf, berry, and blossom, a thoughtful-faced man, with eyes of almost womanly tenderness of expression, wheels an invalid chair along the quiet lanes and by the river which runs through the loveliest country in all England.

His companion is a girl of about fifteen, pale, and evidently a hopeless cripple. Still, the smiles she gives in answer to that of the man speak content and happiness.

Tom Tolliday wishes for no other occupation than that of tending Queen Mab—little Queen Mab, the fairy-sovereign of his home—while she takes all he gives, and forgets her sorrow in the joy of daddy's love.

It would indeed be hard to recognise in these two simple souls the one-time famous clown and the Queen Mab, who made her first and last appearance five years before.

RALPH ENDERBY.

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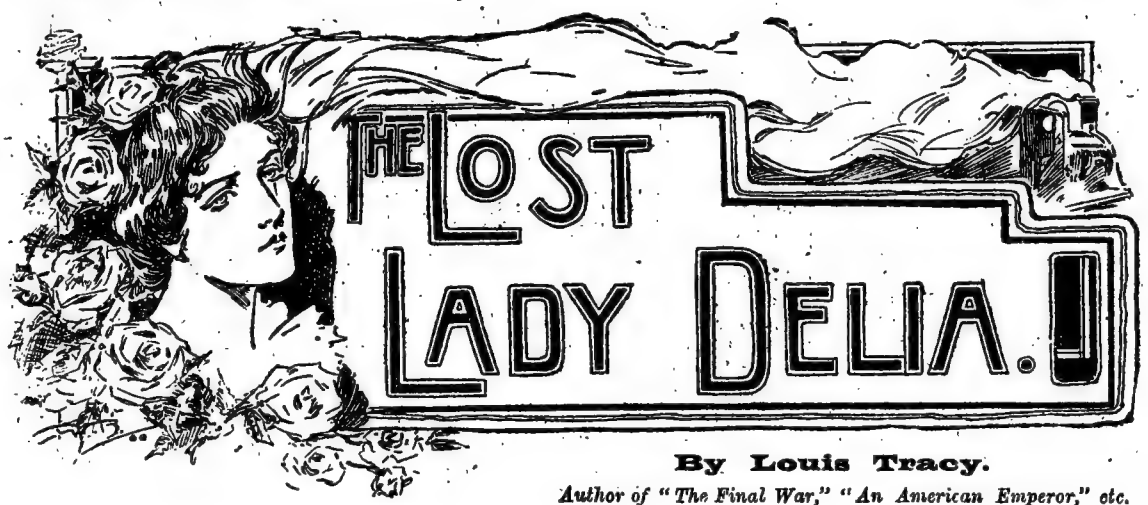
NEW SERIAL STORY. STARTS TO-DAY.



By Louis Tracy.

Author of "The Final War," "An American Emperor," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"Last Seen at Victoria!"

Lady Delia Lyle puckered her handsome forehead into a thoughtful frown as she drew aside the window curtains of her boudoir and tried to look out into the opaque blackness of a November fog.

Behind her was cheerfulness—in front uncertainty. Electric lights, a nice fire reflected from gleaming brass, the luxury of carpets and upholstery, formed an alluring contrast to the dull yellow glare of a single lamp in the outside obscurity.

But Lady Delia was a strong-minded woman. There was no trace of doubt in the wrinkled brows and reflective eyes. She held back the curtains with her left hand, buttoning a glove at the wrist with the other. Fog or no fog, she was going out, and she was already dressed for the occasion, in tailor-made costume and winter toque.

She was annoyed at the weather, but not disconcerted. Too long had she allowed herself to take things easily. The future was as murky as the atmosphere; the past was dramatically typified by the pleasant surroundings from which she resolutely turned her face. Lady Lyle was quite determined as to her actions, and a November night was a most unlikely agent to keep her from following the course she had mapped out.

Moving to the light again, she took out of her pocket a long, closely-written letter. Its details were familiar to her, but her face hardened as she hastily ran through it in order to find a particular passage.

At last she gained her object—to make quite sure of an address. Then she replaced the document, stood undecided for a moment, and touched an electric bell.

"James," she said, to the answering footman, "I am going out."

"Yes, milady."

"Sir Charles is not at home?"

"No, milady."

"I am going to Richmond—to see Lady Gwendoline Talbot. I shall probably not return in time for dinner. Tell Sir Charles not to wait for me."

"Shall I order the carriage for your ladyship?"

"Will you listen to me and remember what I have said?"

"Yes, milady."

James ran downstairs, opened the door, bowed as Lady Lyle passed into Portman-square, and then confidentially informed Buttons that "the missus" was in a "rare old wax" about something. "She nearly jumped down my bloomin' throat when I asked her if she would have the carriage."

Her ladyship's mood did not soften when she drifted from the fixed tenure of Wensley House, Portman-square, into the chaos of Oxford-street and fog at 5.30 on a November evening.

Though not a true "London particular," the fog was chilly, exasperating, tedious. People bumped against each other without apology, 'buses crunched through the traffic with deadly precision, pair-horse vans swept round corners with magnificent carelessness.

In the result, Lady Delia, who meant to walk, as she was somewhat before the time she had fixed upon for this very important engagement, took a hansom. In her present mood slight things annoyed her. Usually, the London cab horse is a thoughtful animal; he refuses to hurry; when he falls he lies contented, secure in the knowledge that for five blissful minutes he will be at complete rest. But this one flew as though oats and Lucerne grass awaited him at Victoria Station on the Underground Railway.

He raced down Park-lane, skidded past Hyde Park-Corner, and grated the off-wheel of the hansom against the kerb outside the station within eight minutes.

In other words, her ladyship, obeying the directions contained in the voluminous letter, was compelled to kill time.

As she stepped from the vehicle and halted beneath a lamp to take a florin from her purse, a tall, ulster-wrapped gentleman, walking rapidly into Victoria-street, caught a glimpse of her face and well-proportioned form.

Instantly his hat was off.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Lady Lyle. Can I be of any service?"

She bit her lip, not unobserved, but the law of Society forced her features into a bright smile.

"Oh, Mr. Brett, is it you? I am going to see my sister at Richmond. Isn't the weather horrid? I shall be so glad if you will put me into the right train."

Mr. Reginald Brett, barrister, with clean-cut, clever features, and dark, deep-set eyes, knew that she would have been much better pleased had he passed without greeting. Like the footman, he wondered why she did not drive in her carriage rather than travel by the Underground Railway on such a night. He guessed that she was perturbed—that her voluble explanation was a disguise.

He reflected that he could ill afford any delay in dressing for a distant dinner, that good manners oft entail inconvenience, but of course he said

"Delighted. Have you any wraps?"

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"No, I am just going for a chat, and shall be home early."

He bought her a first-class ticket, noting as an odd coincidence that it bore the number of the year, 1900, descended to the barrier, found that the next train for Richmond passed through in ten minutes, fumed inwardly for an instant, explained his presence to the ticket-collector, and paced the platform with his companion.

Having condemned the fog, and the last play, and the latest book, they were momentarily silent.

Among the newspaper placards on Smith and Son's bookstall, large type in red and black announced that a "Great Society Scandal" was on the tapis. "The Duke in the Box" formed a telling line, and the eyes of both people chanced on it simultaneously.

Thought the woman: "He is a man of the world, and an experienced lawyer. Shall I tell him?"

Thought the man: "She wants to take me into her confidence, and I am too busy to be worried just now by some small family squabble."

Said she: "Are you much occupied at the Courts just now, Mr. Brett?"

"No," he replied; "not exactly. My practice is more consultative than active. A lot of people seek my advice about matters of little interest, never thinking that they would best serve their ends by acting decisively and promptly themselves."

Lady Delia set her lips. She could be both prompt and decisive. She resolved to keep her troubles, whatever they were, locked in the secrecy of her own heart, and when she next spoke of some trivial topic the barrister knew that he had been spared a recital.

He regretted it afterwards.

At any other moment in his full and useful life he would have encouraged Lady Lyle rather than the reverse. Even now, a few seconds too late, he was sorry. He unbent so far as to try to bring her back to the verge of explanations, but he failed, for her ladyship was a proud, self-reliant personage—one who would never dream of risking rebuff.

A train came, with "Richmond" staring at them from the smoke and steam of the engine.

"Good-bye!" he said.

"Good-bye!"

"Shall I see you again soon?"

"I fear not. It is probable that I shall leave for the South of France quite early."

And she was gone. Her companion rushed to the street, and almost ran to his Victoria-street chambers. It was six o'clock. He had to dress and drive all the way to Hampstead for dinner at 7.30.

* * * * *

At ten minutes past nine Sir Charles Lyle entered Wensley House. A handsome, quiet, gentlemanly man was Sir Charles. He was rich—a Guardsman until the baronetcy devolved upon him, a popular figure in Society, esteemed a trifle fast prior to his marriage, but sobered down now by the cares of a great estate and a vast fortune.

His wife and he were not well-matched in disposition.

She was too earnest, too prim, for the easy-going baronet. He respected her, that was all. A man of his nature found it impossible to realise that the depths of passion are frequently coated over with ice. Their union was irreproachable, like their marriage settlements; but there are more features in matrimony than can be disposed of by broad seals and legal phrases.

Unfortunately, they were childless, and were thus deprived of the one great bond which unites when others may fail.

Sir Charles was hurried, if not flurried. His boots were muddy and his clothes splashed by the mire of passing vehicles.

"I fear I am very late for dinner," he said to the footman who took his hat and overcoat. "But I shall not be five minutes dressing. Tell her ladyship——"

"Milady is not at home, Sir Charles."

"Not at home!"

"Milady went out at half-past five, saying that she was going to Richmond to see Lady Gwendoline Talbot, and that you were not to wait dinner if she was late in returning."

Sir Charles was surprised. He looked keenly at the man as he said:

"Are you quite sure of her ladyship's orders?"

"Quite sure, Sir Charles."

"Did she drive?"

"No, Sir Charles. She would not have the carriage when I suggested it."

The baronet, somewhat perplexed, hesitated a moment. Then he appeared to dismiss the matter as hardly worth discussion, saying, as he went upstairs:—

"Dinner almost immediately, James."

During the solitary meal he was pre-occupied, but ate more than usual, in the butler's judgment. Finding his

She held back the curtains with her left hand, buttoning a glove at the wrist with the other.

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own company distasteful he discussed the November Handicap with the butler, and ultimately sent for a paper.

Opening it, a copy of the Second Extra *Evening News*,

"Good-bye," he said.

the first words that caught his eye were, "Murder in the West End." He read the paragraph, the record of some common-place crime, and turned to the butler.

"There's a lot of these beastly crimes occurring recently, Thompson."

"Yes, Sir Charles. There's bin three since the beginning of the month."

After a pause—"Did you hear that her ladyship had gone to Richmond?"

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Do you know how she went?"

"No, Sir Charles."

"I wanted to see her to-night, *very* particularly. Order the brougham in ten minutes. I am going to the Travellers' Club. I shall be home soon—say eleven o'clock—when her ladyship arrives."

The baronet was driven to and from the club by his own coachman, but on returning to Wensley House was told that Lady Lyle was still absent.

"No telegram or message?"

"No, Sir Charles."

"I suppose she will stay with her sister for the night, and I shall have a note in the morning to say so. Just like a woman. Now if I did that, James, there would be no end of a row. Anxiety, and all that sort of thing. Call me at 8.30."

An hour later, Sir Charles Lyle left the library and went to bed.

At breakfast next morning the master of the house rapidly scanned the letters near his plate for the expected missive from his wife. There was none.

A maid was waiting. He sent her to call the butler.

"Look here, Thompson," he cried, "her ladyship has not written. Don't you think I had better wire? It's curious, to say the least, her going off to Richmond in this fashion, in a beastly fog, too."

Thompson was puzzled. He had examined the letters an hour earlier. But he agreed that a telegram was the thing.

Sir Charles wrote: "Expected to hear from you. Will you be home to lunch? Want to see you about some hunters"; and addressed it to his wife at her sister's residence.

"There," he said, turning to his coffee and sole. "That will fetch her. We are off to Leicestershire next week, Thompson. By the way, I am going to a sale at Tattersall's. Send a groom there with her ladyship's answer when it comes."

He had not long been at the sale-yard when a servant arrived with a telegram.

"Ah, the post-office people are quick this morning," he said, smiling. He opened the envelope and read:

"Want to see you to-day.—Dick."

He was so taken by surprise at the unexpected nature of the message that he read the words aloud, mechanically. But he soon understood, and smiled again.

"Go back quickly," he said to the man, "and tell Thompson to send along the next telegram. This is not the one I want."

A consignment of Waterford hunters was being sold at the time, and the baronet was checking the animals' descriptions on the catalogue, when he was cheerily addressed:

"Hallo, Lyle, preparing for the shires, eh?"

Wheeling round, the baronet shook hands with Reginald Brett.

"Yes—that is, I am looking out for a couple of nice-mannered ones for my wife. I have six eating their heads off at Market Harborough now."

Brett hesitated before he said: "Will Lady Lyle hunt this season, then?"

"Well, hardly that. But she likes to dodge about the lanes with the parson and the doctor."

"I only asked because she told me last night that she would probably winter in the South of France."

"Told you—last night—South of France!" Sir Charles Lyle positively gasped in his amazement.

"Why, yes. I met her at Victoria. She was going to Richmond to see her sister, she said."

"I am jolly glad to hear it."

"Glad! Why?"

"Because I have not seen her myself since yesterday morning. She went off mysteriously, late in the afternoon, leaving a message with the servants. I am naturally glad to hear from you that she got into the train all right."

"I put her in the carriage myself. Have you not heard from her?"

"No. I wired this morning, and expect an answer at any moment. But what is this about the South of France? We go to Leicestershire next week."

"I can't say, of course. Your wife seemed to be a little upset about something. She only mentioned her intention casually—in fact, when I asked her if we should soon meet."

The other laughed, a little oddly in the opinion of his astute observer, and dismissed the matter by the remark that the expected message from his wife would soon clear the slight mystery that attended her movements during the past eighteen hours.

The two men set themselves to the congenial task of criticising the horses trotting up and down the straw-covered track, and Sir Charles had purchased a nice half-bred animal for forty guineas when his groom again saluted him.

"Please sir," said the man, "here's another telegram, and Thompson told me to ask if it was the right one."

Sir Charles frowned at the interruption—a second horse of a suitable character was even then under the hammer—but he tore open the envelope. At once his agitation became so marked that Brett cried—

"Good heavens, Lyle, what is it? No bad news, I hope?"

The other, by a strong effort, regained his self-control.

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"No, no," he stammered; "it's all right, all right. She has gone somewhere else. See. This is from Lady Gwendoline. Still, I wish Delia would consider my natural anxiety a little."

Brett took the proffered flimsy and read:—

I opened your message. Delia not here. I have not seen her for over a week. What do you mean by wire? Am coming to town at once.—Gwen.

The baronet's pale face and strained voice betrayed the significance of the thought underlying the simple question.

"What do you make of it, Reggie?"

Brett, too, was very grave. "The thing looks queer," he said; "though the explanation may be trifling. Come, I will help you. Let us get to your house. It is the natural centre for inquiries."

They hailed a hansom and whirled off to Portman-square. They did not say much, as each felt that the affair might not end so rapidly and satisfactorily as he hoped.

CHAPTER II.

Inspector Winter.

Lady Delia had disappeared.

Whether dead or alive, and if alive, whether detained by force or absent of her own unfettered volition, this handsome and well-known society woman had vanished utterly from the moment when Reginald Brett placed her in a first-class carriage of a Metropolitan Richmond train at Victoria Station.

At first her husband and relatives hoped against hope that some extraordinary tissue of events had contributed to the building up of a mystery which would prove to be no mystery, but a fortuitous combination of circumstances.

Yet the days fled, and there was no trace of her whereabouts.

At the outset the inquiry was confined to the circle of friends and relatives. Telegrams and letters in every possible direction suggested by this comparatively restricted field showed conclusively that not only had Lady Delia not been seen, but no one had the slightest clue to the motives which might induce her to purposely leave her home.

So far as her distracted husband could ascertain she did not owe a penny in the world. She was a rich woman in her own right, and her banking account was in perfect order.

She was a woman of the domestic temperament, always in close touch with her family, and those who knew her best scouted the notion of any petty intrigue which would move her, by fear or passion, to abandon all she held dear.

The stricken baronet confided the search only to his friend Brett. He brokenly admitted that he had not sufficiently appreciated his wife whilst she was with him.

"She was of a superior order to me, Reggie," he said. "I am hardly a home bird. Her ideals were lofty and humanitarian. Too often I was out of sympathy with her and laughed at her notions. But, believe me, we never had the shadow of a serious dispute. Perhaps I went my own way a little selfishly, but at the time I thought that she, on her part, was somewhat strait-laced. I can now appreciate her merits when it is too late."

"But you must not even yet assume that she is dead." The barrister was certain that some day the mystery would be elucidated.

"She is. I feel that. I am certain that I shall never see her on earth again."

"Oh, nonsense, Lyle. Far more remarkable occurrences have been satisfactorily cleared up."

"It is very good of you, old chap, to take this cheering view. Only, you see, I know my wife's character so well. She would die a hundred times if it were possible rather than cause the misery to her people and myself which, if living, she knows must ensue from this terrible uncertainty as to her fate."

"Scotland Yard is still sanguine." This good-natured friend was evidently making a conversation.

"Oh, naturally. But something tells me that my wife is dead, whether by accident or design it is impossible to say. The police will cling to the belief that she is in hiding in order to conceal their own inability to find her."

"A highly probable theory. Are your servants to be trusted?"

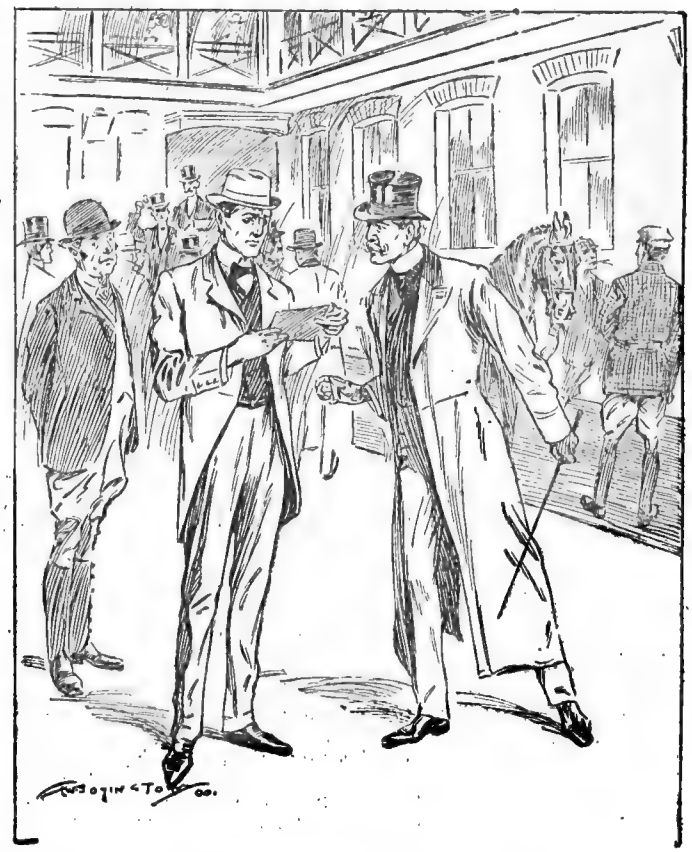
"Y-yes. They have all been with us some years. Why do you ask?"

"Because I am anxious that nothing of this should get into the papers. I have caused paragraphs to be inserted in the fashionable intelligence columns that Lady Lyle has gone to visit some friends in the Midlands. For her own sake, if she be living, it is best to choke scandal at its source."

"Well, Brett, I leave everything to you. Make such arrangements as you think fit."

The barrister's mobile countenance softened with pity as he looked at his afflicted friend.

In four days Sir Charles Lyle had aged many years in appearance. No one who was acquainted with him in the past would have imagined that the loss of his wife could so affect him.



"What do you make of it, Reggie?"

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"Heavens, Brett, how did you learn all this?" cried the baronet.

"I have done all that was possible, yet it is very little," said Brett, after a pause. "You are aware that I am supposed to be an adept at solving curious or criminal investigations of an unusual class. But in this case, partly, I suspect, because I myself am the last person who, to our common knowledge, saw Lady Lyle alive on Tuesday night, I am faced by a dead wall of impenetrable fact, through which my intellect cannot pierce. Yet I am sure that some day this wretched business will be intelligible. I will find Lady Lyle, if living; I will find her murderer if she be dead."

Not often did Reginald Brett allow his words to so betray his thoughts.

Both men were absorbed by the thrilling sensations of the moment, and they were positively startled when a servant suddenly announced:—

"Inspector Winter, of Scotland Yard."

A short, thick-set man entered. He was absolutely round in every part. His sturdy, rotund frame was supported by stout, well-moulded legs. His bullet head, with close-cropped hair, gave a suggestion of strength to his rounded face, and a pair of small bright eyes looked suspiciously on the world from beneath well-arched eyebrows.

Two personalities more dissimilar than those of Reginald Brett and Inspector Winter could hardly be brought together in the same room. People who are fond of tracing resemblances to animals in human beings would liken the one to a greyhound, the other to a bulldog.

Yet they were both masters in the art of detecting crime—the barrister subtle, analytic, introspective; the policeman direct, pertinacious, self-confident. Brett lost all interest in a case when the hidden trail was laid bare. Mr. Winter regarded investigation as so many hours on duty until his man was transported or hanged.

The detective was well acquainted with his unprofessional colleague, and had already met Sir Charles in the early stages of his present quest.

"I have an important clue," he said smiling with assurance.

"What is it?" Sir Charles Lyle was for the moment aroused from his despondent lethargy.

"Her ladyship did not go to Richmond on Tuesday night."

Inspector Winter waited for Brett to speak, but the barrister nodded, with the air of one who knew already that Lady Delia had not gone to Richmond.

Mr. Winter continued. "Thanks to Mr. Brett's remembrance of the number of the ticket, we traced it at once in the clearing office. It was given up at Sloane Square immediately after the Richmond train passed through.

Brett nodded again. He was obstinately silent, so the detective questioned him directly:

"By this means the inquiry is narrowed to a locality—eh, Mr. Brett?"

"Yes," said the barrister, turning to poke the fire.

Mr. Winter was sure that his acuteness was displeasing to his clever rival. He smiled complacently, and went on:

"The ticket-collector remembers her quite well, as the giving up of a Richmond ticket was unusual at this station. She passed straight out into the square, and from that point we lose sight of her."

"You do, Mr. Winter, eh?" said Brett.

"Well, sir, it is a great thing to have localised her movements at that hour, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. To save time I may tell you that Lady Delia returned to the station, entered the refreshment room, ordered a glass of wine, which she hardly touched, sat down and waited some fifteen minutes, left the room, crossed the square, asked a newsvendor where Raleigh Mansions were, and gave him sixpence for the information."

His hearers were astounded.

"Heavens, Brett, how did you learn all this?" cried the baronet.

"Thus far, it was simplicity itself. On Wednesday evening, when no news could be obtained from Lady Lyle's relatives, I started from Victoria, intending to call at every station until I found the place where she quitted the train. The railway clearing-office was too slow, Mr. Winter. Naturally, the hours being identical in the same week, the first ticket-collector I spoke to gave me the desired clue. The rest was a mere matter of steady inquiry."

"Then you are the man whom the police are now searching for?" blurted out the detective.

"From the railway official's description? Possibly. Pray, Mr. Winter, let me see the details of my appearance as circulated throughout the force. It would be interesting."

Mr. Winter was saved from further indiscretions by Sir Charles Lyle's plaintive question:—

"Why did you not tell me these things sooner, Reggie?"

"What good was there in torturing you, Lyle? All that I have ascertained is the A.B.C. of our search. We are at a loss for the motive of your wife's disappearance. Victoria,

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Sloane-square, or Richmond—does it matter which? My belief is that she intended to go to Richmond that night. Why, otherwise, should she make to the footman and myself the same unvarying statement? Perhaps she did go there?"

"But these houses, Raleigh Mansions. What of them?"

"Ah, there we may be forwarded a stage. But there are six main entrances and no hall porters. There are twelve flats at each number, seventy-two in all, and all occupied. This means seventy-two separate inquiries into the history and attributes of a vastly larger number of persons, in order to find some possible connection with Lady Delia and her purposely-concealed visit. She may have remained in one of these flats five minutes. She may be in one of them yet. Anyhow, I have taken the necessary steps to obtain the fullest knowledge of the inhabitants of Raleigh Mansions."

"Scotland Yard appears to be an unnecessary institution, Mr. Brett," snapped the detective.

"By no means. It is most useful to me once I have discovered a criminal. And it amuses me."

"Listen, Reggie, and you, Mr. Winter," pleaded the baronet. "I implore you in future to keep me informed of developments in your search. The knowledge that progress is being made will sustain me. Promise, I ask you."

"I promise readily enough," answered Brett. "I only stipulate that you prepare yourself for many disappointments. Even a highly-skilled detective like Inspector Winter will admit that the failures are more frequent than the successes."

"True enough, sir. But I must be going, gentlemen." Mr. Winter was determined to thoroughly work the new vein of Raleigh Mansions before even his superiors were aware of its significance in the hunt for her lost ladyship.

When the detective had quitted the room there was silence for some time. Lyle was the first to speak.

"Have you formed any sort of theory, even a wildly speculative one?" he asked.

"No. None whatever. The utter absence of motive is the most puzzling element of the whole situation."

"Whom can my wife have known at Raleigh Mansions? What sort of places are they?"

"Quite fashionable, but not too expensive. The absence of elevators and doorkeepers cheapens them. I am sorry now that I mentioned them to Winter."

"Why?"

"He will disturb every one of the residents by injudicious inquiries. Each housemaid who opens a door will be to him a suspicious individual, each butcher's boy an accomplice, each tenant a principal in the abduction of your wife. If I have a theory of any sort, it is that the first definite news of Lady Delia will come from Richmond. There cannot be the slightest doubt that she was going there on Tuesday night."

"It will be very odd if you should prove to be right," said Sir Charles.

Again they were interrupted by the footman, this time the bearer of a telegram, which he handed to his master.

The latter opened it, and read: "What is the matter? Are you ill? I certainly am angry.—Dick."

He frowned with real annoyance, crumpling up the message and throwing it in the fire.

"Confound people who bother one at such a time," he growled.

Soon afterwards Brett left him.

True to the barrister's prophecy, Inspector Winter made life miserable to the denizens of Raleigh Mansions. He visited them at all hours, and, in some instances, several times. Although, in accordance with his instructions, he never mentioned Lady Delia's name, he so pestered the occupants with questions concerning a lady of her general appearance that half-a-dozen residents wrote complaining letters to the company that owned the mansions, and the secretary lodged a protest at Scotland Yard.

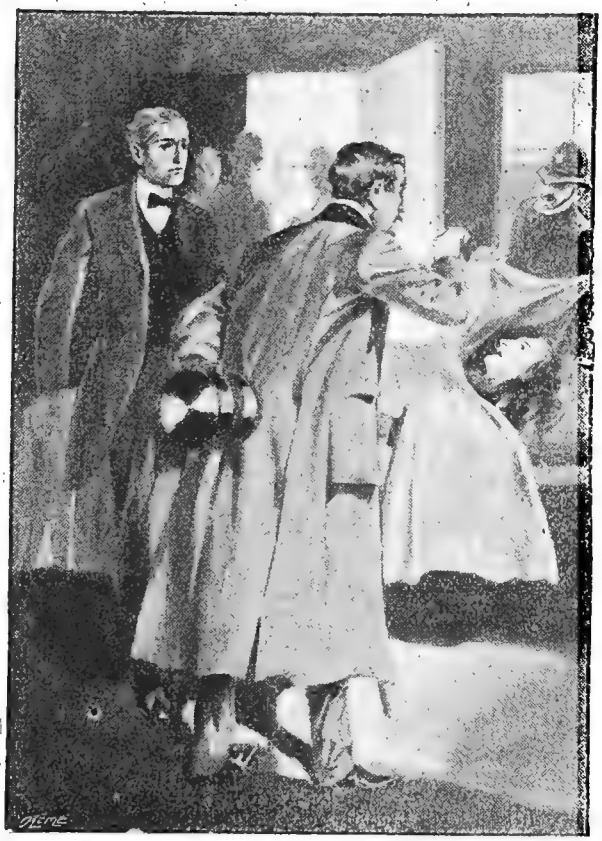
Respectable citizens object to detectives prowling about, particularly when they insinuate questions concerning indefinite ladies in tailor-made dresses and fur toques.

At the end of a week Mr. Winter was nonplussed, and even Reginald Brett had to confess that his more carefully conducted inquiries had yielded no result.

But towards the close of the month a sensational turn was given to events.

The body of a woman, terribly disfigured from long immersion in the water and other causes, was found in the Thames at Putney.

It had been discovered under peculiar circumstances. A



"I am sure this is not she. Let us get away quick."

drain pipe that emptied into the river beneath the surface was moved by reason of some sanitary alterations, and the workmen intrusted with the task were horrified at finding a corpse tightly wedged beneath it.

Official examination revealed that although the body had been in the water fully three weeks, the cause of death was not drowning. The woman had been murdered, beyond a shadow of doubt. A sharp iron spike was driven into her brain with such force that a portion of it had broken off, and remained imbedded in the skull.

If this was not sufficient there were other convincing proofs of foul play.

Although her coat and skirt were of poor quality, her linen was of a class that could only be worn by some one who paid as much for a single under garment as most women do for a good costume, but there were no laundry marks, such as are usual, upon it.

On the feet were a pair of strong walking boots, bearing

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the stamped address of a fashionable bootmaker in the West End. Among a list of customers to whom the tradesman supplied footgear of this size and character appeared the name of Lady Delia Lyle.

Not very convincing testimony, but sufficient to bring Sir Charles Lyle to the Putney mortuary in the endeavour to identify the remains as those of his missing wife.

In this he utterly failed.

Not only was this poor misshapen lump of distorted humanity wholly unlike Lady Delia, but the colour of her hair was different.

Her ladyship's maid, called to identify the linen—even the police admitted that the outer clothes were not Lady Lyle's—was so upset at the repulsive nature of her task that she went into hysterics, protesting loudly that it could not be her mistress she was looking at.

Brett differed from both of them. He quietly urged Sir Charles to consider the fact that a great many ladies give a helping hand to Nature in the matter of hair tints. The chemical action of water would——

The baronet nearly lost his temper.

"Really, Brett, you carry things too far," he cried. "My wife had none of these vanities. I am sure this is not she. The mere thought that such a thing could be possible makes me ill. Let us get away, quick."

So a coroner's jury found an open verdict, and the poor unknown was buried in a pauper's grave.

The newspapers dismissed the incident with a couple of paragraphs, though the iron spike planted in the skull afforded good material for a telling head-line, and within a couple of days the affair was forgotten.

But Reginald Brett, barrister and amateur detective, was quite sure in his own mind that the nameless woman was Lady Delia Lyle.

He was so certain—though anything like an identification of the body was impossible, owing to the condition it was in—that he bitterly resented the scant attention given to the matter by the authorities, and he solemnly swore that he would not rest until he had discovered her destroyer and brought the wretch to the bar of justice.

CHAPTER III.

The Lady's Maid.

The first difficulty experienced by the barrister in his self-imposed task was the element of mystery purposely contributed by Lady Delia herself. To a man of his quick perception, sharpened and clarified by his legal training, it was no impossible undertaking to arrive at the positive facts underlying the trivial incidents of his meeting with the missing lady at Victoria Station.

Briefly stated, his summary was this: Lady Delia intended to go to Richmond at a later hour than that at which his unexpected presence had caused her to set out. She had resolved upon a secret visit to some one who lived in Raleigh Mansions, Sloane Square—some person whom she knew so slightly as to be unacquainted with the exact address, and, as the result of this visit, she desired subsequently to see her sister at Richmond.

Sir Charles Lyle was apparently in no way concerned with her movements, nor had she thought fit to consult him, beyond the mere politeness of announcing her probable absence from home at the dinner hour.

To one of Brett's analytical powers the problem would be more simple were it, in a popular sense, more complex. In these days it is a hard thing for a woman of such position in society to be suddenly spirited out of the world without leaving trace or sign. He approached his inquiry with less certainty, owing to Lady Delia's own negative admissions, than if she had been swallowed up by an earthquake and he were asked to determine her fate by inference and deduction.

It must be remembered that he was sure she was dead—murdered, and that her body had been lodged by human agents beneath an old drain-pipe at Putney.

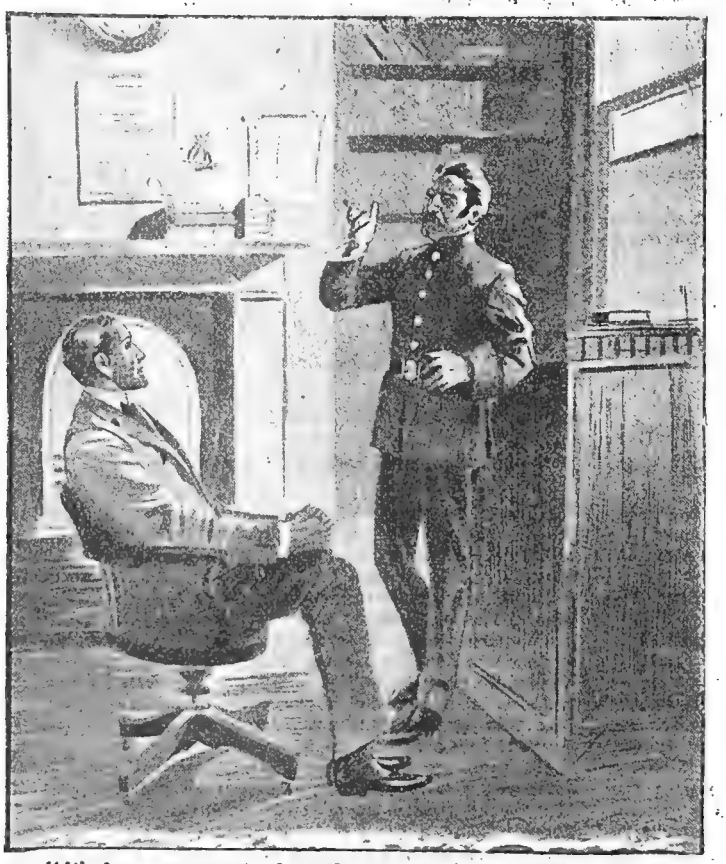
What possible motive could any one have in so foully killing a beautiful, high-minded, and charming woman, whose whole life was known to her associates, whom the breath of scandal had never touched?

The key of the mystery might be found at Raleigh Mansions, but Brett felt that this branch of his quest could wait until other more transient features were cleared up.

He practically opened the campaign of investigation at Putney. Mild weather had permitted the workmen to conclude their operations the day before the barrister reached the spot where the body had been found—that is to say, some forty-eight hours after he had resolved to neither pause nor deviate in his search until the truth was laid bare.

A large house, untenanted, occupied the bank, with solid front facing the road, and a lawn running from the drawing-room windows to the river. Down the right side of the grounds the boundary was sharply marked by a narrow lane, probably a long disused ferry road, and access to this thoroughfare was obtained from the lawn by a garden gate.

A newly marked seam in the roadway showed the line of the drainage work, and Brett did



"It's been gone to Scotland Yard for the best part of a week."

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not glance twice at the point where the pipe entered the Thames, as the structural features here were recent.

He went to the office of the contractor who had carried out the alterations.

An elderly foreman readily answered his questions.

"Yes, sir. I was in charge of the men who were on the job. It was an easy business. Just an outlet for rain from the road. An old-fashioned sort of affair; been there thirty or forty years, I should think; all the pipes were crumbling away."

"Why were the repairs effected at this moment?"

"Well, sir, the house was empty quite a while. You see, it used to be a school, a place where young gents were prepared for the Army. It was closed about a year ago, and it isn't everybody as wants so many bed rooms. I do hear as how the new tenant has sixteen children."

"The incoming people have not yet arrived?"

"No, sir."

"Can you tell me the name of the schoolmaster?"

"Oh, yes. When I was younger I have done a lot of carpenter's work for him. He was the Reverend Septimus Childe."

Brett made a note of the name, and next sought the local police-inspector.

"No, nothing fresh," said the latter, in reply to a query concerning the woman "found drowned."

"I suppose these things are soon lost sight of?" said Brett, casually.

"Sometimes they are, and sometimes they aren't. It's wonderful occasionally how a matter gets cleared up after years. Of course we keep all the records of a case, so that the affair can be looked into if anything turns up."

"Ah, that brings me to the most important object of my visit. A small piece of iron was found imbedded in the poor woman's skull."

The inspector smiled as he admitted the fact.

"Can I see it? I either want the loan of it for a brief period, or to have an exact model made."

Again the policeman grinned.

"I don't mind telling you that you are too late, sir."

"Too late! How too late?"

"It's been gone to Scotland Yard for the best part of a week."

So others beside the barrister thought that the Putney incident required more attention than had been bestowed upon it.

* * * * *

Brett concluded his round by a visit to the surgeon who gave evidence at the inquest.

The doctor had no manner of doubt that the woman had been murdered before being placed in the water, the state of the lungs being proof positive on that point.

"It is equally indisputable that she was put to death by malice aforethought?"

"Oh, yes. A small iron spike was absolutely wedged into the brain through the hardest part of the skull."

"What was the nature of the injuries that caused death?"

"This piece of iron penetrated the occipital bone at the lower part, and injured the cerebellum, damaging all the great nerve centres at the base of the brain."

"Would death ensue instantly?"

"Yes. Such a blow would have the effect of a high voltage electric current. Complete paralysis of the nerve centres means death."

"Well, I'm jiggered," said the detective.

"Then I take it that great force must have been used?"

"Not so much, perhaps, as the nature of the wound seems to imply; but considerable—sufficient, at any rate, to break the piece of iron."

"It was broken, you say? Was it cast iron?"

"Yes, of good quality. Off some ornament or design, I should imagine. But it snapped off inside the head at the moment of the occurrence."

"Curious, is it not, for a person to be killed in such a manner by such an instrument?"

"I have never before met such a case. Were it not for the way in which the body was jammed beneath a hidden drain pipe, and the effective means taken to destroy identity, I should have inclined to the belief that some strange accident had happened. At any rate the murderer must have committed the crime on the spur of the moment, and seized upon the first weapon to hand."

"You say she was forcibly placed where found?"

"Yes; the workmen's description left no other idea."

"Could not the tide have done this?"

"Hardly. One cannot be quite emphatic, as such strange things do happen. But it seems to be almost impossible for the tide at Putney to pack a body beneath a jutting drain pipe in such manner that the waist, or narrowest part, should be beneath the pipe and the body remain securely held."

"Yet it is not so marvellous as the coincidence that this particular drain should need repairs at the precise period when this tragedy happened."

"Quite so. It is exceedingly strange. But are you

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interested in the case? Have you reason to believe that this poor woman——?"

"I hardly know," broke in the barrister. "I have no data to go upon, but I feel convinced that I shall ultimately establish her identity. You, doctor, can help me much by telling me your surmises in addition to the known facts."

The medico looked thoughtfully through the window before he exclaimed: "I am certain that the woman found in the Thames came from the upper walks of life. Notwithstanding the disfiguring effects of water and rough usage, any medical man can rapidly appreciate the caste of his subject. She was, I should say, a woman

He proceeded to array himself in the most fashionable clothes he possessed.

of wealth and refinement, one who led an orderly, well-regulated life, whose surroundings were normal and healthy."

Brett thanked his informant and hurried back to London.

A telegram to Inspector Winter preceded him. He had not long reached his Victoria-street chambers when the detective was announced.

Reggie soon made known his wishes. "I want you to get me possession of that small piece of iron found in the head of the woman at Putney. If necessary, I will return it in twenty-four hours."

Mr. Winter's face showed some little sign of annoyance. "It is against the rules," he began; but Brett curtly interrupted him.

"Very well, I will make direct application to the Commissioner."

"I was going to say, Mr. Brett, that although not strictly in accordance with orders, I will make an exception in your case." And the detective slowly produced the *pièce de conviction* from a large pocket-book.

In sober fact the police-officer was somewhat jealous of the clever lawyer, who saw so quickly through complexities that puzzled his slower brains. He was in no wise anxious to help the other in his inquiries, though keenly wishful to get the benefits of his discoveries, and follow out his theories when they were defined with sufficient clearness.

Reggie did not at first take the proffered article.

"Let me understand, Mr. Winter," he said. "Do you object to my presence in this inquiry? Are you going to hinder me or help me? It will save much future misunderstanding if we have this point settled now."

The detective flushed at this direct inquiry. "I will be candid with you, Mr. Brett. It is true I have been vexed at times when you have over-reached me. But I regret it immediately. It is foolish of me to try and solve problems by your methods. Kindly forget my momentary disinclination to hand over the only genuine link in the case."

"In what case?"

"In the case of Lady Delia's disappearance."

"Ah! Then you think it is in some way connected with the woman found at Putney?"

"I am sure of it. The woman at Putney, whether Lady Delia herself or not I cannot tell, wore some of Lady Delia's clothes. When we have ascertained the means and manner of the death of the woman buried at Putney we shall not be far from learning what has become of Lady Delia Lyle."

"How have you identified the clothes?"

"I managed to gain the confidence of the lady's-maid, who gave evidence at the inquest. She, of course, is quite positive that the body was not that of her mistress, but when I had examined some of Lady Delia's linen I no longer doubted the fact."

"If you knew all this, how comes it that more did not transpire at the coroner's inquiry?"

"In such affairs an inquest is rather a hindrance to the police. It is better to lull the guilty person or persons into he belief that the crime has passed into oblivion. They know as well as we do that Lady Delia is buried at Putney. We have failed to establish her identity by the evidence of the husband and servants. The linen and clothes, our sole effective testimony, remain in our possession, so, taking everything into consideration, I prefer that matters should remain as they are for the present."

"Really, Mr. Winter, I congratulate you. You will perhaps pardon me for saying that some of your colleagues do not usua ly take so sensible a view."

The policeman smiled at the compliment. "I am learning your method, Mr. Brett," he said.

As he spoke a servant entered with a note addressed to Brett and indorsed "Urgent."

It was in the handwriting of Sir Charles Lyle, and even the imperturbable barrister could not resist an exclamation of amazement when he read:

My Dear Brett,—My wife's maid has vanished. She has not been near the house for three days. The thing came to my ears owing to gossip amongst the servants. There is something maddening about these occurrences. I really cannot stand any more. Do come and see me, there's a good fellow.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said the detective. "The blessed girl must have been spirited away a few hours after I saw her. Maybe, Mr. Brett, we are all wrong. Has she gone to join her mistress?"

"Possibly—in the next world."

Nothing would shake the barrister's belief that Lady Delia Lyle was dead.

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CHAPTER IV.

No. 61 Raleigh Mansions.

Really, the maid deserved to have her ears pulled.

People in her walk of life should not ape their betters. Lady Delia, owing to her position, was entitled to some degree of oddity or mystery in her behaviour. But for a lady's maid to so upset the entire household at Wensley House, Portman-square, was intolerable.

Sir Charles became, if possible, more miserable; the butler fumed; the housekeeper said that the girl was always a forward minx, and the footman winked at buttons as much as to say that he knew a good deal if he liked to talk.

As a matter of fact the police were as greatly baffled by this latter incident as by its predecessor. This time the movements of the maid were quite unknown. No one could tell definitely when she left the house. Her fellow-servants described the dress she probably wore, as all her other belongings were in her bed-room; but beyond the fact that her name was Jane Harding, and that she had not returned to her home in Lincolnshire, the police could get no further clue.

So, in brief, Jane Harding quickly joined Lady Delia in the limbo of forgetfulness.

Brett, however, forgot nothing. Indeed, he rejoiced at this incident.

"The greater the apparent mystery," he communed, "the less it is in reality. We now have two tracks to follow. They are both hidden, it is true, but when we find one it will probably intersect the other."

The new year was a few days old when Brett made his first forward step through the bewildering maze which seemed to bar progress on every side. He received a report from the man, a pensioned police-officer, who had been making a painstaking research into the history and occupation of every inhabitant of Raleigh Mansions.

Two items the barrister fastened on to at once.

"At No. 12, top floor right, entrance by first door on Sloane Square side, is a small flat occupied by a man named Sydney H. Pyne. He passes as an American, but is probably an Englishman who has resided in the United States. He does not mix with other Americans in London, and is of irregular habits. He frequents race meetings and sporting clubs, is reputed to belong to a Piccadilly club where high play is the rule, and has no definite occupation. He occasionally visits a lady who lives at No. 61, same mansions, ground floor, and sixth door. They have been heard to quarrel seriously, and the dispute appears always to have concerned money. Pyne left for Monte Carlo early in December. His address there is Hotel du Cercle, and the local post-office has a supply of stamped and addressed envelopes in which to forward his correspondence.

"At No. 61, as already described, lives Mrs. Gwendoline Hillmer. She maintains a good style of living, has a brougham and victoria, rented by the month, and is either a wealthy widow or maintained by some one of means. She dresses well, and goes out a good deal to theatres, but otherwise leads a rather lonely life. Her most frequent visitor is, or was, a gentleman who looked like an officer in the Guards, and, much less often, the aforesaid Sydney H. Pyne. Her servants, except the maid, live out. The maid, who is a sort of companion, is talkative, but does not know much, or, if she does, will not speak."

Brett weighed the foregoing statements very fully. They did not contain any positive facts that promised well for the elucidation of Lady Delia's visit to the mansions on that fateful November evening, but the absolute colourlessness of the reports concerning the other occupants rendered them quite impossible of individual distinction.

After an hour of puzzled thought the barrister finally decided upon a course of action. He would see Mrs. Gwendoline Hillmer, and trust to luck in the way of discoveries.

A quiet smile lit up his handsome regular features as he proceeded to array himself in the most fashionable clothes he possessed, paying the utmost attention to every detail in a manner that amazed his valet.

When at last that worthy was dispatched to the nearest florist's for a *boutonnière*, he communicated his bewilderment to the hall-porter.

"My guvnor's going out on the mash," he said confidentially. "I thought he would never look at a woman; but bless you, Jim, we're all alike. When the day comes for us we all rush after a petticoat."

It was nearly six o'clock when Brett walked down Victoria Street. For some reason he did not call a hansom, and it was almost with a start that he found himself purchasing a ticket to Sloane Square at the Underground Railway office. At this precise hour and place he had last

"Are you a policeman?"

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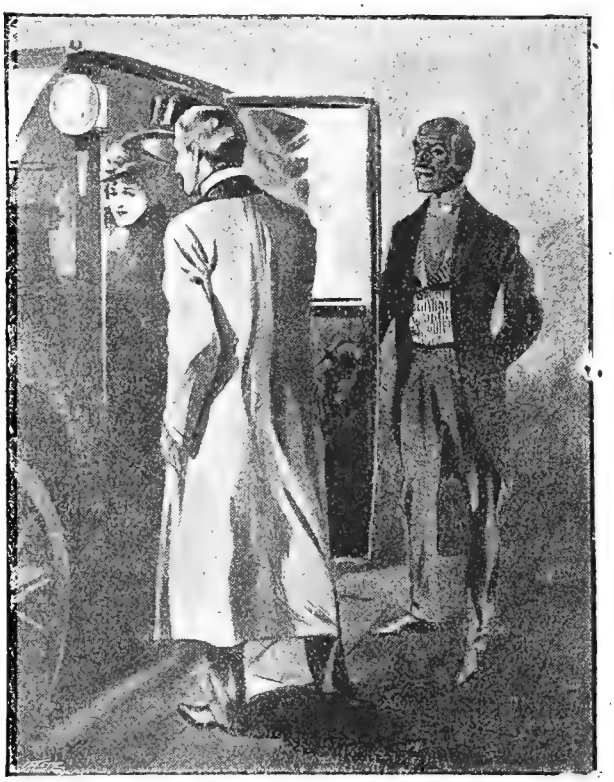
seen Lady Delia on earth. The memory nerved him to his purpose.

A few minutes later he pressed the electric bell that communicated with No. 61, Raleigh Mansions. As he



When his master entered a brougham in which was seated a fur-wrapped lady the valet grinned broadly.

listened to the slight jar of the indicator within, he smiled at the apparent fatuity of his mission.

He had one card, perhaps a weak one, to play, it was true, but he hoped that circumstances might prevent this from being tabled too early in the game.

The door opened, and a youthful housemaid stood before him, the simple wonder in her eyes showing that such visits as his were rare ones at that establishment.

"Is Mrs. Hillmer at home?" he said.

"I'll see, sir, if you give me your name."

"Surely you know whether or not she is at home?"

The girl stammered and blushed at this unexpected query. "Well, sir," she said, "my mistress is in, but I do not know if she can receive a visitor. She is dressed to go out."

"Ah! that's better. Now take her my card and say that whilst I will not detain her, my business is very important." This with a sweet smile that put the flurried maid entirely at her ease.

The girl withdrew, after hesitating for a moment to decide the important question as to whether or not she should close the door in the visitor's face.

Another smile from Brett, and she did not.

He was thus able to note the luxurious and tasteful air of the general appointments, for the entrance-hall to an establishment usually reveals much of the characteristics of the inmates. Here there was every evidence of refinement and wealth. All the display had not been lavished on the drawing-room.

As he waited, conscious of the fact that his colloquy with the servant had been heard within, a lady crossed from one room to another at the end of the passage. Her smart but simple dress and the quick scrutiny she gave him, as though discovering his presence accidentally, caused him to believe—rightly, as it transpired—that this was the maid-companion described by his assistant.

Not only had she obviously made her appearance in order to see him, but the housemaid had carried his message to a different section of the flat.

The girl returned. "My mistress will see you in a few minutes," she said. "Will you kindly step into the dining-room?"

He followed her, sat down in a position where the strong glare of the electric lamps would fall on any one who stood opposite to him, and awaited developments.

The furniture was solid and appropriate, the carpet rich, and the pictures, engravings for the most part, excellent. This pleasant room, warmed by a cheerful fire, impressed Brett as a place much used by the household. Books and work-baskets were scattered about, and a piano, obviously out of place, blocked up a corner. There were a few photographs of persons and places, but he had no time to examine these before the lady of the house entered.

Her appearance, for some reason inexplicable to the barrister himself, took him by surprise. She was tall, graceful, extremely good-looking, and dressed with quiet elegance. Just the sort of woman one would expect to find in such a well-appointed abode, yet more refined in manner than Brett, from his knowledge of the world, thought he would meet, judging by the hasty inferences drawn from his subordinate's report. She was self-possessed, too. With calm tone, and slightly elevated eyebrows, she said:

"You wish to see me, I understand?"

"Yes. Allow me first to apologise for the hour at which I have called."

"No apology is necessary. But I am going out. Perhaps you will be good enough not to detain me longer than is absolutely necessary."

She stood between the table and the door. Brett, who had risen at her entrance, was at the other side of the room. Her words, no less than her attitude, showed that she desired the interview to be brief. But, if possible, the barrister resolved that he would not be repelled so coolly.

Advancing, with a bow and that fascinating smile of his, he said, pulling forward a chair:

"Won't you be seated?"

The lady looked at him. She saw a man of fine physique and undoubted good breeding. She hesitated. There was no reason to be rude to him, so she sat down.

Reggie drew a chair to the other side of the hearth-rug and commenced:

"I venture to ask this interview for the purpose of making some inquiries."

"I thought so. Are you a policeman?" The words blurted out impetuously, a trifle complainingly, but Brett gave no sign of their interest for him.

"Good gracious, no," he cried. "Why should you think that?"

"Because two detectives have been bothering me, and every other person in these mansions, about some mysterious lady who called here two months ago. They don't know where she called, nor will they state her name; as if anyone could possibly know anything about it. So I naturally thought you were on the same errand."

"Confound that rascal Winter," growled Reggie to himself.

But Mrs. Hillmer went on: "If that is not your business, would you mind telling me what it is?"

Now Brett's alert brain had been actively engaged during the last few seconds. This woman was not the clever, specious adventuress he had half-expected to meet. It seemed more than ever unlikely that she could have any knowledge of Lady Delia or the causes that led to her

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disappearance. He was tempted to frame some excuse and take his departure. But the certainty that Lady Delia had visited Raleigh Mansions, and the necessity there was for exploiting every line of inquiry impelled him to adopt his last resource.

"It is not concerning a missing lady, but concerning a missing gentleman that I have come to see you."

The shot went home.

Why, for the life of him he could not tell, but his companion was manifestly disturbed at his words.

"Oh," she said.

Then, after a little pause: "May I ask his name?"

"Certainly. He is known as Mr. Sydney H. Pyne."

She gave a slight gasp.

"Why do you put it that way? Is not that his right name?"

"I have reason to believe it is not."

Mrs. Hillmer was so obviously distressed that Brett inwardly reviled himself for causing her so much unnecessary suffering, as the reason for her emotion in all probability had not the remotest bearing upon his quest.

Then came the pertinent query, after a glance at his card, which she still held in her hand:—

"Who are you, Mr.—Mr. Reginald Brett?"

"I am a member of the Bar, of the Inner Temple, My chambers are at No. 7, Paper-buildings, and my private residence is given there."

"And why are you interested in Mr. Sydney Pyne?"

"Ah, in that respect I am at this moment unable to enlighten you."

"Unable, or unwilling?"

Brett indulged in a quiet piece of fencing:

"Really, Mrs. Hillmer," he said, "I am not here as in any sense hostile to you. I merely want some detailed information with regard to this gentleman, information which you may be able to give me. That is all."

All this time he knew that the woman was scrutinising him narrowly—trying to weigh him up, as it were, not because she feared him, but rather to discover the true motive of his presence.

Personally, he had never faced a more difficult task than this make-believe investigation. He could have laughed at the apparent want of connection between Lady Delia's ill-fated visit to Raleigh Mansions and this worrying of a beautiful, pleasant-mannered woman, who was surely neither a principal nor an accomplice in the crime that caused Lady Delia's death.

"Well, I suppose I may consider myself in the hands of counsel. Tell me what it is you want to know!" Mrs. Hillmer pouted, with the air of a child about to undergo a scolding.

Brett was quite at a loss to understand her, but he acted his *rôle* with a skill few men could equal.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Pyne's present address?" he said.

"No. I have neither seen him nor heard from him since early in November."

"Can you be more precise about the period?"

"Yes, perhaps." She rose, took from a drawer in the sideboard a packet of bills—receipted, Brett saw—searched through them and found the document she was looking for. "I bought a few articles about that time," she explained, "and the account for them is dated November 15. I had not seen my——" She blushed, became confused, laughed a little, and went on. "I had not seen Mr. Pyne for at least a week before that date—say November 8th or 9th."

Lady Delia disappeared on the evening of the 6th!

Brett swallowed his astonishment at the odd coincidence of dates, for he said, with an encouraging laugh, "Out with it, Mrs. Hillmer. You were about to describe Mr. Pyne correctly, when you recollected yourself."

Mrs. Hillmer, still colouring and becoming saucily cheerful, cried, "Why should I trouble myself when you, of course, know all that I can tell you, and probably more? He is my brother, and a pretty troublesome sort of relation, too."

"I am obliged for your confidence, Mrs. Hillmer. In return, I am free to state that your brother is now in the South of France."

"As you are here, Mr. Brett," she said, "I may as well get some advice gratis. Can people writ him in the South of France? Can they ask me to pay his debts?"

"Under ordinary circumstances they can do neither. Certainly not the latter."

"I hope not. But they sometimes come very near to it, as I know to my cost."

"Indeed! How?"

Mrs. Hillmer hesitated. Her smile was a trifle scornful, and her colour rose again as she answered: "People are not averse to taking advantage of circumstances. I have had some experience of this trait in debt-collectors already. But they must be careful. You, as a legal man, must know that demands urged on account of personal reasons may come very near to levying blackmail."

"Surely, Mrs. Hillmer, you do not suspect me of being a dun. Perish the thought! You could never be in debt to me."

"Very nice of you. Don't you represent those people in Leadenhall-street, then?"

"What people?"

"Messrs. Dodge and Co."

"No, why do you ask?"

"Because my brother entered into what he called a 'deal' with them. He underwrote some shares in a South African mine, as a nominal affair, he told me, and now they want him to pay for them because the company is not supported by the public."

"No, I do not represent Dodge and Co."

"Is there something else then? Whom do you represent?"

"To be as precise as permissible, I may say that my inquiries in no sense affect financial matters."

"What then?"

"Well, there's a woman in the case."

Mrs. Hillmer was evidently both relieved and interested. "No, you don't say," she said. "Tell me all about it. I never knew Bertie to be much taken up with the fair sex. I am all curiosity. Who is she?"

Brett did not take advantage of the mention of a name which in no way stood for Sydney. Besides, perhaps the initial stood for Herbert. He resolved to try another tack.

Glancing at his watch, he said: "It is nearly seven o'clock. I have already detained you an unconscionable time. You were going out. Permit me to call again, and we can discuss matters at leisure."

He rose, and the lady sighed: "You were just beginning to be entertaining. I was only going out to dine at a restaurant. I am quite tired of being alone."

Was it a hint? He would see. "Are you dining by yourself, then, Mrs. Hillmer?"

"I hardly know. I may bring my maid."

Reggie now made up his mind. "May I venture," he said, "after such an informal introduction, to ask you to dine with me at the Prince's Restaurant, and afterwards, perhaps, to look in at the Jollity Theatre?"

The lady was unfeignedly pleased. She arranged to call for him in her brougham within twenty minutes, and Brett hurried off to Victoria Street in a hansom to dress for this unexpected branch of business.

When he told his valet to telephone to the restaurant and the theatre respectively for a reserved table and a couple of stalls, that worthy chuckled.

When his master entered a brougham in which was seated a fur-wrapped lady, the valet grinned broadly. "I knew it," he said. "The guvnor's on the mash! Now, who would ever have thought it of him?"

(To be continued.)

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT GIRAFFES.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "A Bitter Vintage," by K. Douglas King, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. G. T. White, Plasnewydd House, Roath, Cardiff. Attempts this week must deal with Stories about ANY SUBJECT, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, December 24th. Post-cards only, please.

Undoubtedly.

A PARISH minister was examining a class of boys. In order to test their intellect he told them he would give a penny to the one who should first tell him what was the highest form of animal life.

Silence reigned for a moment, when a red-headed urchin at the bottom of the class, whose joyful face proclaimed that he was in possession of the grand secret, snapped his fingers with great glee and shouted:

"I ken't, I ken't, Mr. Minister."

"Well, my boy, will you kindly inform me what it is?"

"The giraffe," was the prompt reply.

G. T. W.

What a Neck!

A PARTY of laundry workers went some time ago to London, and, of course, the Zoo was included in the programme. After wandering round a bit, they came at last to the giraffes.

When they had gazed in wonder for some moments, one of the party exclaimed:

"Crikey! What a neck!"

Another moment of silence followed, and then:

"Well. Aw shouldn't like to get linen up for a family of six wi' necks like that!"

J. W.

A Donkey Raiser.

A GIRAFFE attached to a travelling circus got loose one night, and made a light meal off some geraniums and other plants that grew in a flower-box outside the bedroom window of an Irish costermonger.

In the morning Mike discovered his loss, and was much puzzled thereby, until looking out of the window he observed his donkey quietly grazing below.

"Bedad, thin so ye're the thafe, are ye!" he exclaimed. "But, by Saint Pathrick, I'd loike to see th' mon thot lifted ye up, I should."

J. B.

Wot Nex'!

Two boys were gazing in wonderment at the giraffes in a circus procession, passing through the town.

"I say, Bill," said one, "what a nobby long cool drink them there animals could 'ave, with a throat that length."

"Yus," admitted Bill, "but wot a thunderin' lot o' flannel they'd want, if ever they 'ad a sore throat."

J. D. W.

Poor Giraffe.

AN itinerant showman some years ago had pitched his "canvas" on the downs at Lewes.

The giraffe, being so tall, was accommodated in a tent all to himself, and it would seem that the poor animal was, among other uses, used as a tent pole, judging from the following:

One night the wind blew a hurricane, and, on being met next morning by a partner, or assistant, who inquired about the menagerie, he said:

"It did blow awful. The other tents was shook a bit, but the one with the giraffe suffered terribly. Why, if it had not been tied to his neck it would have been blown clean away."

W. B.

A Neckstraordinary Escape.

LONGBOW was in great form the other evening, and the fellows at the club were listening to his yarns with rapt attention.

"Yes," he said, in reply to someone's query, "I have had some narrow shaves in my time, but about the closest shave I ever had was when I was at Cairo some years ago. It was, indeed, an extraordinary escape. You see, it was like this:

"I was staying at the Grand Hotel, and one night, after all the occupants had retired, a big fire broke out in the basement, and in a few minutes the whole building was a mass of flames. I was sleeping off the effects of over-indulgence when it happened, and it was some time before the noise and bustle awoke me. When I did awake, however, I saw that my position was almost hopeless; for my room was on the sixth landing, and as the fire had worked its way upwards all means of retreat were cut off. Then I rushed to the window, only to find escape impossible that way, and I gave all up for lost.

"Suddenly, my hopes were renewed, for a native came galloping across the square with a giraffe. Stopping directly beneath the window at which I stood calling for help, the intelligent animal reared aloft its head and planted its chin firmly on the window-sill, thus forming an excellent fire-escape, and in another moment I had slid down its neck to the ground, and I was saved!"

"But, look here, old man," said Billson, "if that giraffe could reach six storeys, it was a pretty tall one, wasn't it?" "Yes" chimed in a cynical listener, "and in that respect it bears a striking resemblance to his yarn. Anyhow, we can't deny the fact that our friend there had a neckstraordinary escape."

A. V.

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A Vegetarian.

"This," said the showman, "is a fine specimen of a giraffe. Its diet is principally a vegetable one, carrots being a great delicacy."

"For goodness' sake, Bill," exclaimed a youth to a chum, whose locks flamed like an Eastern sunset, "stand back a bit, or there's no telling what'll happen!"

"Very good advice, young man," said the showman, turning to the interrupter; "but have a care yourself, for I must tell you the animal is equally fond of greens."

E. C.

Interred.

In the middle of a stiff paper on practical chemistry, the boys competing for a certain scholarship found the following extraordinary question: "What is a giraffe? Tell all you know about it."

Whether it had got there through a printer's error, or was merely a ponderous attempt at a joke, nobody could determine; so the boys, with one exception, wisely fought shy of the question.

The exception was the pampered son of a merchant prince, who conducted his scientific experiments in a costly laboratory of his own. Not to be beaten, he answered the question thus:

"I am sorry I never experimented with giraffes. Pa brought me one from foreign parts in his ship, but the poor thing got its head raffled in the rigging, and had to be shot. They interred it in the Bay of Biscay."

R. A. H. G.

Dressing on the Railway.

There is a story told of a lady and gentleman travelling together on one of our railways. They were strangers to each other. Suddenly the gentleman said:

"Madam, I will trouble you to look out of the window for a few minutes; I am going to make some changes in my wearing apparel."

"Certainly, sir," she replied, with great politeness, rising and turning her back upon him. In a short time he said:

"Now, madam, my change is completed, and you may resume your seat."

When the lady turned she beheld her male companion transformed into a dashing lady, with a heavy veil over her face.

"Now, sir, or madam, whichever you are," said the lady, "I must trouble you to look out of the window, for I also have some changes to make in my apparel."

"Certainly, madam," and the gentleman in lady's attire immediately complied:

"Now, sir, you may resume your seat."

To his great surprise, on resuming his seat, the gentleman in female attire found his companion transformed into a man.

He laughed, and said:

"It appears that we are both anxious to escape. What have you done? I have robbed a bank."

"And I," said the whilom lady, as he dexterously fettered his companion's wrists with a pair of handcuffs, "am Detective A., and in female apparel have shadowed you for two days. Now," drawing a revolver, "keep still!"

M. H. E.

A Lift Incident.

Two women wandered into a large block of offices, and halted near the lift.

They saw the place was nicely carpeted, and contained comfortable seats, and one of them took a look in the mirror.

"Now, Eliza," said the older one, "you just take a seat in this sittin'-room while I go upstairs and see the lawyer."

Eliza took a seat in the lift, and the old lady started up the stairs.

She had just reached the first landing when she heard a yell and saw the "sittin'-room" flying towards the sky with Eliza inside.

The old lady was dumb with amazement, and stood looking upwards at the lift which paused a moment at the seventh floor and then started to descend. As it passed her she saw Eliza was still alive and she hastened to the lower floor, where she arrived in time to seize her as she came out.

"Did it blow up?" she inquired.

"No," replied the young woman, "it didn't blow up, but it flew up."

"Perhaps that young man was trying to elope with you," said the old lady, pointing her finger at the lift boy. "You come here at once. This is no doubt one of those places that we have been readin' about where they kidnap people, and right in daylight too. It is a lucky thing that I saw the kidnapper or he might have carried you off for good. Come along before he kidnaps both of us."

The two women made a bolt for the avenue and disappeared, and it took a bucket of water to revive the lift boy.

YOUR HEAD AND SHOULDERS ONLY.

If you have a relative who has passed away either at home in peace or abroad in war, send his photograph—which you probably cherish—and we will enlarge it to a beautiful India ink and crayon portrait, 15in. by 12in., mounted on plate sunk mount 24in. by 19in.

Relatives of soldiers at the front may obtain one of these enlargements for 6s.

Other photographs will be enlarged for 7s.

You will certainly get a genuine bargain by availing yourself of this offer. The enlargements can be made from any photograph, large or small, tin-types, or any kind of glass picture, provided the print is legible. All the enlargements are of the head and shoulders only.

What to do.

Write your name and address plainly in ink on a slip of paper, also on the back of the portrait you are sending us. Get a postal order for 7s. (if the photograph be that of a soldier or sailor get a 6s. postal order). Place all of these in an envelope, or make a securely packed parcel of them and address it to the PORTRAIT EDITOR, *Pearson's Weekly*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

A Reduction of Threepence

on each enlargement, when the order is for two or more from the same photograph, will be made.

Orders will be treated in rotation.

All photographs—particularly those on glass—should be securely packed. Although all possible care will be taken, we do not hold ourselves responsible for photographs damaged or lost in transit.

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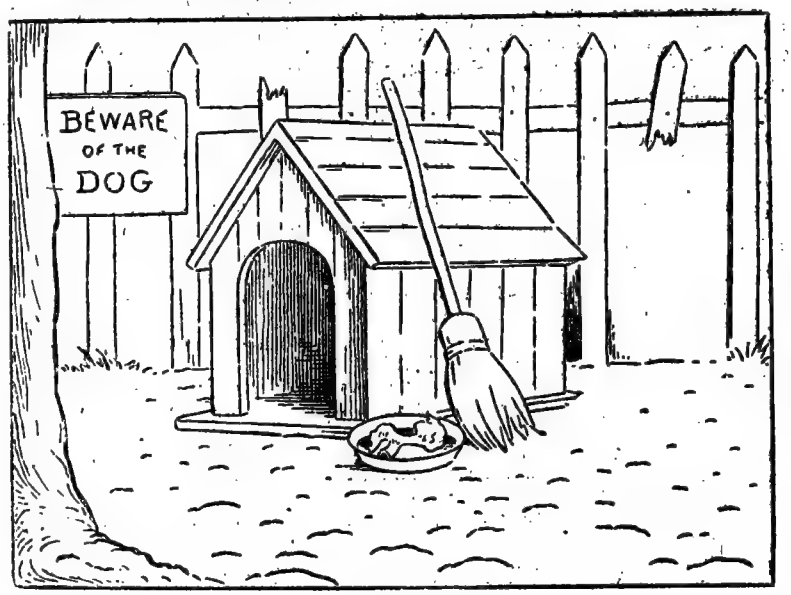
"QUICK CHANGE" PUZZLES.

First Prize ... ... *A Magnificent Graphophone.*
Second Prize ... ... *£2.*
Six Prizes of ... ... *10s. each.*

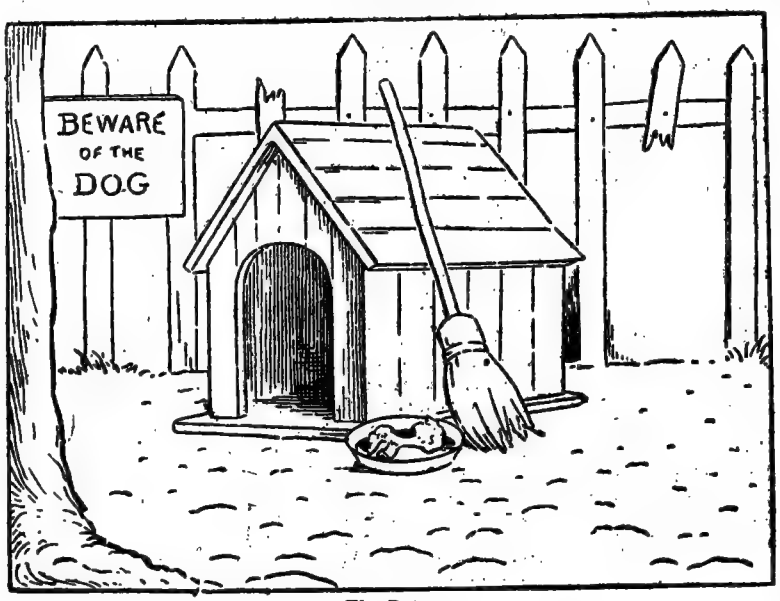
On this page you will find two drawings exactly alike, and a number of parts of animals. What you have to do is to cut out the parts of the animals at the dotted lines, and paste them on the picture in the way they should go. There is no guess work about it. Each part of an animal should be pasted on a certain spot, and will fit no other spot.

When you have pasted up your picture, put it by until two more sets have appeared. We will tell you the closing date in good time. Competitors may make any number of attempts, but each set of three puzzles must be sent in separately.

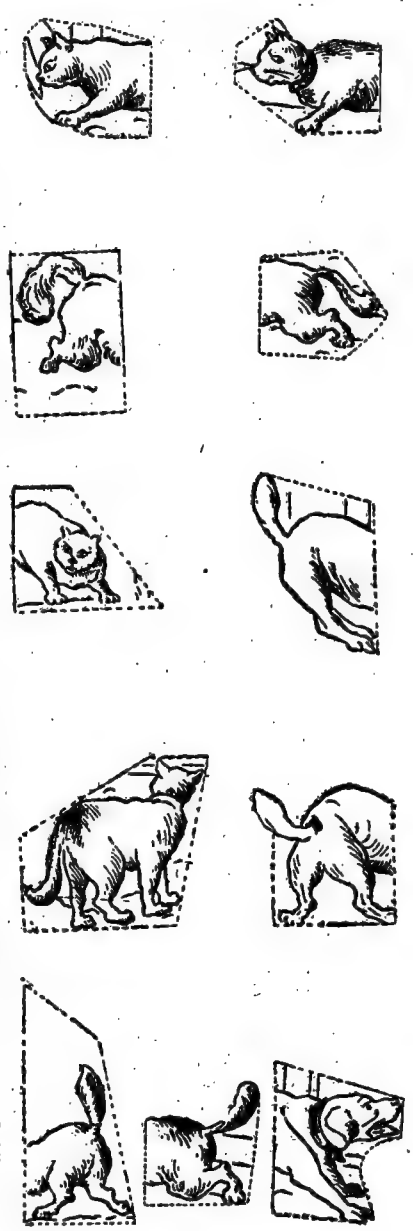
Competitors must abide by the Editor's final decision, and may enter only on that understanding.



The Attack.



The Retreat.



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The Thoughtfulness of Twopenny.

Father and mother were having tea when Twopenny fell over the door-mat into the dining-room.

"I wanted to surprise you," he explained when he had recovered himself and picked up an ungainly parcel.

"You might have tried walking in quietly, old man," said father looking up sharply.

"He's only six," apologised mother.

Twopenny smiled at her. He was a solid, nice-looking boy, with baby-blue eyes and a huge smile.

"You'll say it's very good for me," he stated confidently.

He never claimed higher praise than this, being conscious that he could not approach the merits of his big sisters.

"Umph!" said father, whose notions of goodness did not always coincide with Twopenny's.

"Tell me, dear," asked mother.

"You will be surprised." He had a weakness for surprising people. "You see."

He bumped the package down heavily on the tea-table, knocking over an emptied cup and upsetting the cake upon the floor.

"I am surprised," said father, "that it wasn't the full cup!"

This is the sort of thing he usually says. Mother put her arm round Twopenny, which is what she usually does.

"The shilling that Uncle Jack gave me next day," he said mysteriously. He meant yesterday.

"You were going to save it."

"Ye-es." He fidgeted by one leg and nearly overbalanced. "Somefink better 'curred to me."

"To spend it?" inquired father, who is clever at guessing things.

He nodded.

"I wanted to buy somefink for ev'rybody."

Mother stroked his hair.

"Like a kind little boy," she said approvingly.

Twopenny undid the parcel with slow importance, and displayed—three loaves of bread! Father roared with laughter, and mother looked—surprised.

"Oh, Twopenny!" she cried. "Whatever made you do it?"

"Don't we give you enough to eat?" inquired father.

Twopenny looked from one to the other, and the big blue eyes grew a little moist.

"I couldn't fink of anyfink else that would be plenty for ev'rybody," he explained.

There was the least tremble about his mouth.

"It was very kind of you, darling," said mother quickly; "I shall like some for dinner, and so will father, won't you?"

Father inspected a loaf critically. It was the soft, brand-new kind, which is worst for the digestion.

"Of course I shall," he said. "It is a superior kind of bread, now I come to look at it."

Twopenny beamed with satisfaction.

"It was clever for me, wasn't it?" he claimed.

Father agreed. Also he took him on his knee and showed him the inside of his watch, where the time is made.

"You know, Twopenny," he explained presently, "you can't give presents to everybody. There are such a lot of people."

"More than twenty?"

This was as far as Twopenny had learnt to count. Some greater thinkers have fancied that the world went no further than their understanding.

"More than twenty. So you have to pick out a few. It's not a bad thing, either, to make sure that they want what you are going to give them. It would be no use my giving a big boy like you frocks, would it?"

"No," said Twopenny, laughing at such an absurd idea.

"Do you know what *I* should do, if I were going to give somebody bread?"

Twopenny shook his head.

"Why, I should see first who hadn't enough bread, and hadn't anybody to give it to them. Do you see?" Twopenny nodded. "You just think about it."

So Twopenny thought. Perhaps if father had thought a little more it would have occurred to him that it was dangerous to set Twopenny thinking.

* * * * *

Twopenny does not think quickly, but he keeps on for a long time, and thinks a good deal before he is done. It was October when he bought the new loaves, and father had the bad attack of indigestion, and told him to think. It was the end of November when he

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concluded that Mrs. MacDaub, the washerwoman, was a person who hadn't enough bread, and hadn't anyone to give it to her. About a week later cook noticed an extraordinary rise in the bread-book, and began thinking also. Cook is one of those people who can't keep their thoughts to themselves.

"There's waste goin' on," she told nurse, "an' I ain't goin' to take the credit of it. Master Alan eatin' 'earty, indeed! Why, 'e couldn't do it, not if 'e was a helephant, nor you neither!"

This set nurse thinking also. Thought is a curious thing, and you can never tell where it will lead to. It led nurse to the big toy cupboard, and then to mother. Master Alan had accumulated ten half-loaves, and fifty-seven pieces of bread, she reported, most of them now very stale. He was saving them for a present to Mrs. MacDaub and her six small children, he stated. He was of opinion that this arrangement was very good for him; and that it would be a surprise.

It did seem rather a surprise to mother, but unfortunately she did not consider his proceedings really good. It was very wrong, she told him, and he mustn't do it any more because it was stealing. Father took his part, however. It was following the same principle, he said, as the church bazaar, at which mother had recently been assisting. You robbed your friends to give to the poor.

"Oh, John!" said mother. "They needn't be robbed unless they like!"

This was so, father admitted, "in theory"—Twopenny did not know where this was—but it came to much the same "in practice"—which Twopenny knew was in the sum-booke, where you learn that two and two make four.

"I couldn't fink of anyfink else that would be plenty for ev'rybody."

"However," father said, "in future if you want to give away anything of mother's, or mine, or anybody else's, you must ask for it first. If you don't *I* shall begin thinking of something you won't like. If you *must* think, just think of that."

So Twopenny continued thinking upon a revised plan; and as Christmas was approaching, and he was a generous little boy, his thoughts took the shape of Christmas presents for people who weren't getting any, and what he could ask father, mother and sisters to give him to give to them. The difficulty was that they gave so many Christmas boxes that nobody of importance seemed to be left out; but after careful researches he found two such unfortunate persons.

The first was Mr. Richards, whose garden was at the back of theirs, and who talked to Twopenny over the fence. He and father used to talk a great deal also, but now they didn't, because of something that happened in "business"—which everyone knows is in the City, wherever that is. Father said that it was because Richards wasn't "straight." He did stoop a little certainly, but Twopenny considered this rather a reason for charity. Besides, he hadn't any little boys and girls of his own to borrow his pennies to buy him presents like Twopenny was going to buy for father.

The other unfortunate was Fred Hanson. Fred used to come every evening to see his Sis, but now he didn't. This was a pity, because he was very jolly, and Twopenny liked him. Sis was jolly, too, but she wasn't quite so jolly as she used to be, and he feared that perhaps this was why Fred stayed away.

He suggested it to Mabel, who was fifteen and clever enough to take prizes at the High School. She said that Twopenny was confusing cause and effect—which he believed because he couldn't understand—and that they were a pair of great stupids—which he believed because he could. Anyhow, Mabel was quite clear that none of them were likely to send Fred a present this Xmas. So Twopenny made up his mind that he would, if he could get somebody to give him something to send. His own pocket-money was already mortgaged for presents to the family.

* * * *

Upon the morning of Christmas Eve Twopenny eluded nurse, and found his way into the library, where mother was busy adding a few words on some cards with printed writing and addressing envelopes. He ought not to have come, she told him—as he expected—but he might stay if he was very quiet—which he expected also. So he stayed.

"Are they presents?" he inquired, nodding at the cards.

"Yes," said mother, "in a way."

They were, in fact, invitations to dinner, which she was sending to a few friends who were likely to be lonely on Christmas day.

"Who for?"

"People."

"What people. Growed-up ones?"

"Yes, dear. Don't bother, there's a good boy."

"Will they be pleased?"

"I hope so. I can't write if you talk so, Alan."

"Why didn't you buy pretty picture cards? Do people like reading ones best?"

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"Some do."

Mother finished directing envelopes and put the cards in. Some were left, he noticed.

"Give me a card," he begged, "and a wellup."

"Very well." She gave him one of each.

"Write on my card," he requested, "like you wrote on the others."

Mother wrote and handed it to him with a smile. She was thinking that it was for a dear little guest. It read like this:

If you have no engagement for dinner (2 p.m.) on Christmas Day, Mr. and Mrs. Nugent will be glad of your company.

R. S. V. P.

The Firs,
Rockwood Road,
Upper Burnton.

"Now run away and play, dear," said mother.

So Twopenny ran down to the bottom of the garden, to look for Mr. Richards, who was sure to be smoking a pipe there before lunch.

When he saw Twopenny's head over the fence he walked down to him.

"He's a nice little chap," he was thinking. "I've a good mind to send him a present as usual, in spite of his father." For Mr. Richards thought that father hadn't been "straight" in the "business" I mentioned. This was quite a mistake, for father is as upright as a —soldier.

"I've got a present for you, Mr. Richards," said Twopenny. "You'll be surprised."

"Yes," said Mr. Richards. "I am. What is it?"

"It's this," said Twopenny, handing over the card in its envelope. "It's nice reading, what grown up people like. You look at it."

Mr. Richards looked at it so long, and wrinkled his forehead so much, that Twopenny suspected that he couldn't read very well.

"Ye-es," he said slowly, at last. "It's very nice reading. Do you know what it says?"

"No-o. I—I didn't buy it," Twopenny confessed. "I'd spent all my pennies, you know; but I wanted to give you somefink. So mamma gived it to me for you."

"You're sure you asked her for it?" said Mr. Richards doubtfully.

"I never take other people's fings wivout asking them —not now," declared Twopenny solemnly. Mr. Richards looked at it again, and pulled his moustache.

"Did your mother know it was for me?" Twopenny thought the matter over carefully. He knew it was for Mr. Richards; and mother knew much more than he did, everyone said. So she must know.

"Yes," he said decidedly. "Of course she did."

Mr. Richards seemed buried in thought. It was a queer way to send the invitation; but doubtless they had noticed his friendliness for the child.

"Don't you like it?" asked the boy anxiously.

"Very much," he said. "Only I am surprised." Twopenny laughed and rubbed his fat hands.

"I fought you would be," he said gleefully.

He was so pleased with himself that he kept smiling and rubbing his hands all the afternoon. When nurse asked the reason, he explained that he was only thinking, which made her extremely apprehensive.

"The things that boy thinks of," she told cook, "you'd never credit!"

* * * * *

Twopenny's thinking did not lead to any evil result so far as nurse observed. So, after dinner, she washed

"Did your mother know it was for me?"

him and let him go to find Sis, who generally read to him in the afternoon. He liked Sis's reading best of everybody's, because she had such a pleasant voice, and looked so nice while she read. He knew this was so, because Fred Hanson had corroborated his opinion.

He found Sis engaged in sending off her Christmas cards. They were beautiful pale blue ones, with a photo of Sis at the corner, and some reading underneath. This is what it said:

If meeting and greeting the Fates should end,
Yet once a friend is always a friend!

Twopenny edged up to the table and touched one of the cards gingerly.

"My hands is clean," he stated, holding them up for inspection.

"Very well, dear," said Sis, patting his head before resuming her writing.

So he inspected the card at leisure. It certainly was a pretty card, especially at the corner where the photo was. Fred would like that part, he decided; but mamma and Mabel had impressed upon him that he must not talk to Sis about Fred. So he thought, and at last Sis noticed that he was thinking.

"What is it, old blue eyes?" she asked, smiling at him in her kind way.

"I want one," he said.

She hesitated.

"They're rather expensive, dear, you know," she objected.

The first day that Twopenny had a card he usually thumb-marked it all over. The next day he drew things meant for British soldiers slaughtering enemies upon the back. The third day he drew soldiers and enemies upon the picture side. The fourth day it disappeared.

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"I'd be awful careful with it," he promised, looking up at her pleadingly, "an' keep it in the wellup, if you gived me one."

So Sis kissed him, and gave him a card in a pale blue "wellup."

He said "Fank you," very politely—he was always polite to mamma and Sis—and ran off to find Mabel, who was sprawling on the sofa, reading a Christmas number. He jumped on her with a rush and sent the Christmas number flying. Mabel was the sort of girl you could jump on. She generally boxed his ears, it was true; but she never did it very hard.

On this occasion they scuffled till both rolled on the floor, which made them laugh a great deal. Then Mabel took him by the legs and shook him till his pockets emptied on the floor.

"You little horror!" she cried. "You've taken one of Sis's cards. Oh, you naughty boy!"

"I didn't," denied Twopenny, when he was right way up again; "she gived me it."

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright," he vowed. So Mabel knew it was true. "I'm goin' to send it to someone, an' you'll d'rect it, won't you?"

"You send it? To whom, pray?"

"Fred Hanson, 'cause——"

"Nonsense!" said Mabel sharply.

"Tisn't!" said he indignantly.

Mabel put her hair straight in front of the glass. She did not care whether it was straight or not really, but she liked to do as grown-up girls do.

"No-o," she admitted, "I'm not sure that it is."

"Come along," said Mabel quickly, "I'll take you up to-night."

She looked thoughtfully at something and didn't see it, like she looks when home lessons are hard. "It's rather a clever idea for you, Twopenny," she said at last. "You mustn't tell anybody if I do"

"No. It'll be a secret, won't it?" Twopenny loved a secret. "Won't he be surprised?"

"I think he will," said Mabel with a gleam in the corner of her eyes. She walked over to the writing-table and took up a pen hesitatingly. Hesitation is rare with clever Mabel. "I wonder," she remarked half to herself, "if they really meant to—— Oh, but I'm sure they do. It's just silly, foolish pride."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Twopenny impatiently.

"You won't tell anyone? Honour bright?"

"Honour bright."

Mabel addressed the envelope rapidly. "I write very like Sis," she thought with another smile.

"Shall I ask mamma for a stamp?"

"No, no! It's to be a secret, you silly boy. Run and tell nurse to put on your things to come out with me. And if you say a word about it I'll—*excorpusculate you.*"

Twopenny could only be daunted by words that he could not understand.

So Mabel took him out and bought the stamp, and treated him to little cakes with icing on and ginger-beer.

"You're not half-bad Twopenny, for a kid," she assured him.

As a matter of fact, she thought him the nicest small boy that ever was; but she knew that male creatures must not be flattered, because of their excessive vanity.

"You've been such a good boy to-day, Alan," said mother," when he was going off to bed.

"So far as we know," qualified father cautiously.

Twopenny beamed.

"If you knowed what you don't know," he began mysteriously.

"Come along," said Mabel quickly; "I'll take you up to-night," and she hustled him off.

Father laughed when they were out of hearing.

"I'm afraid he's been thinking again," he said.

"He *means* well," said mother softly, and father nodded.

* * * * *

Santa Claus left a sleigh-load of presents during the night, and Mr. Richards sent a clockwork train on Christmas morning. So Twopenny was fully occupied; but he could not help noticing that some strange things happened.

Just as breakfast was finishing, the postman came with letters for everybody. When Sis saw one of hers she trembled, and when she opened it she began to smile and cry quietly at the same time. As soon as she had finished reading it she went out of the room. Mabel followed her; and when Twopenny went in search of Mabel, who had promised to arrange a lead-soldier battle, he found them hugging one another in an extraordinary manner. Sis picked him up and kissed him more times than he liked to be kissed, and gave him an ivory penholder, and promised to make him a khaki suit, like a real soldier's; and Mabel carried him downstairs on her shoulder, and played with his toys, and was jollier even than usual.

"She's had a letter from Fred. Twopenny," she whispered. "It's all through your card."

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"What did it say?"

"I don't know," stated Mabel. But she did. It was this:

DEAR LITTLE FRIEND—MORE THAN FRIEND—

I've kissed the pretty face on your pretty card a hundred times. Once a true lover, always a true lover; and I was your true lover, Sis. It's been just a silly mistake, and so much my fault. Will you meet me in the park after church? I can't do without you, dear.

Always your lover,

FRED.

Father also received a letter, which seemed to surprise him. He was showing it to mother when the girls left the table. This is how it ran:

MY DEAR NUGENT,—

I have the greatest pleasure in accepting your kind invitation to Christmas dinner. Thinking matters over I see that we misjudged one another. We ought both to have known that neither would take an unfair advantage intentionally. You have had the largeness of mind to recognise this first. A happy Christmas to you and yours.

Yours most sincerely,

HY. RICHARDS.

"You good little woman, to think of inviting him!" said father, putting his hand on mother's shoulder for a moment.

"But I didn't, dear," said mother. "I can't think how——" then she suddenly remembered Twopenny and his card.

Presently father and mother came down to the breakfast-room, where Mabel was amusing her brother. Mother petted him quietly. Father didn't say much, only smoked; but when mother went off to make some dinner arrangements, he stayed and joined in the games.

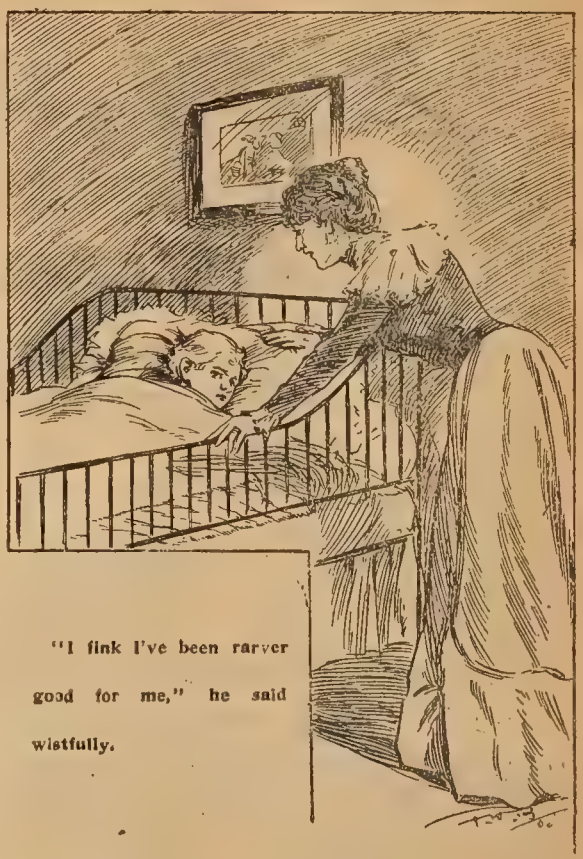
"I want you and Sis to pay every attention to Richards, Mab," he said presently. "He's coming to dinner." Mabel raised her eyebrows. "Peace and goodwill, you know."

"Yes, dad." Mabel was silent for a time. Then her mischievous eyes began to sparkle. "Won't I be enough to amuse him?" she inquired. "I'm getting awfully grown up; and Sis will have Fred to attend to, you see."

"Eh? What?" cried dad. "Fred? Well I am glad."

He laughed like a boy—indeed mother says he is half a boy still, though his hair is getting thin.

Then mother came in and they all explained things. Only Twopenny was so busy playing with his soldiers that he did not hear.



"I fink I've been rarver good for me," he said wistfully.

It occurred to him during the afternoon and evening that everybody was very kind to him. This set him thinking; and he concluded that it was because they were good, and that he ought to be good also, so far as a little boy of six could.

"I fink I've been rarver good, for me," he said wistfully when mother tucked him in bed.

Mother bent over him and hugged him. "So good, darling," she said; and somewhere, right down in her heart, she prayed a prayer. OWEN OLIVER.

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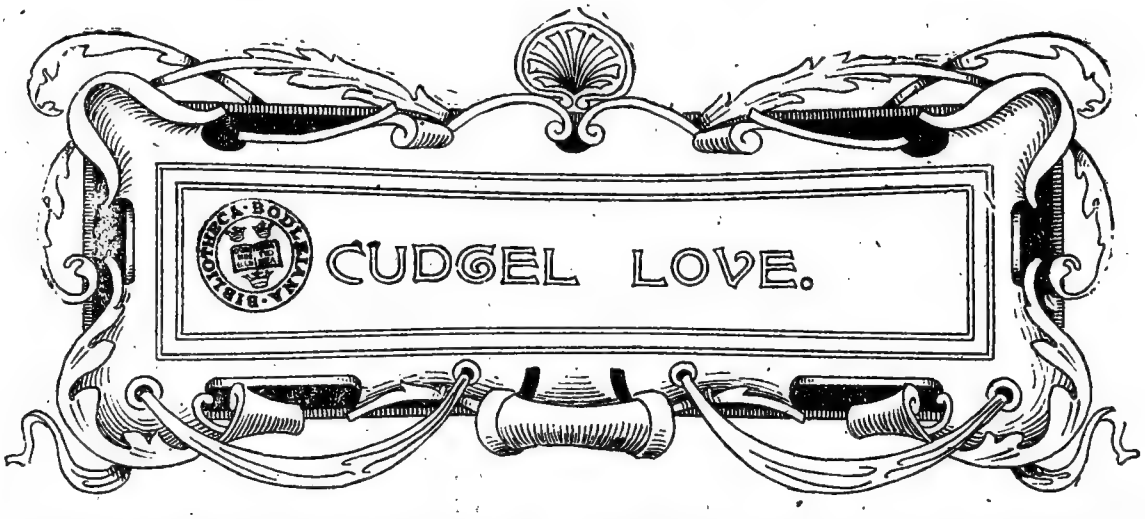

How much do nine and seven, and three and a quarter, and fifteen, and one thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine and threequarters make? Two thousand and twenty-four. What do five thousand a year, a good constitution, a well-drained house, a popular temper, and a shrewish wife make? An all sort-of-life, happy and not happy, chequered, like a Highland plaid. What do a pretty girl and an old gentleman drinking brandy without knowing it, and a coward and a cudgel, make? Give it up? A story for the Christmas number of SHORT STORIES—the shortest Christmas story that was ever written for the finest Christmas number that ever was published. Wonderful powers of addition!

Listen, Christmas boys and Christmas girls. Stir the fire, until the sparks fly up the chimney as bright and as fast as loving looks from laughing eyes. Attention! Turn upon me, faces all, young and old, blooming and wrinkled. No coughing. No flirting. Nothing until the story is done, for done it quickly must be.

Here I am, well-known to be the second-best writer in England for spinning a story out, and the editor—between ourselves, a tasteless despot—tells me I shall have four pages, and no more. I seem to hear his scissors click and snip above my head in anticipation, like a hungry giant trying his jaws while his wife is getting his little bit of dinner ready.

If the story is jerky, abrupt, beginning too late and ending too soon, blame not the author, for he, with proper scope given to his unrivalled faculty, could produce a narrative such as every reader in the Empire would admit to be long enough. But to be measured by the inch, pruned, cropped, clipped, lopped, shaved, cut out and cut off and cut up, is fatal to that sort of Clarissa-Richardson-Pamela-Grandison genius, which critics tell me I possess. And now for the story.

An old friend of mine was for thirty years (and is still) practising in the town of Westerham. He never was a man of great ability, but, being careful and conscientious, he had gained the confidence of a large circle of patients. Let us call him Thompson, for his real name I must not tell you. Thompson had a son, who was studying the art of healing, and a daughter, who was studying the art of heart-breaking, and seemed likely to take honours.

Nelly Thompson's saucy face and twinkling eyes ensnared the eldest son of a wealthy merchant who lived in the neighbourhood. The father was a self-made man, and, though vulgar, had a force of character which made him respectable in society. The son, as is very common with the children of such parents, had all the father's vulgarity without his shrewd genius. He was a low, coarse, purse-proud fellow, and had not, I believe, sufficient culture to admire Nellie Thompson as she deserved.

But he heard her praised, and wanted to marry her, and thought, of course, that, with his personal and pecuniary attractions, he was sure of the girl. "No, thank you," pretty Nell said. It was all over the town in no time that pretty Nell had refused Charlie Stott, and Charlie was perfectly savage. He revenged himself in a way worthy of his character.

Old Dr. Thompson had for some time been in imperfect health. He worked on at his profession, but brokenly. His disease—disease it could hardly be called—was a species of cerebral weakness, which often simulates the graver form of brain mischief, but as often manifests itself only in a general decline of power. Of this affection a distinct symptom, in many cases, is intolerance of alcohol in any form. Sometimes a patient, in such a state, will be completely upset by a glass or two of wine.

This was Dr. Thompson's case, and, unfortunately, Stott, who had been a frequent visitor at his house, had ascertained it. Now it fell out that, shortly after Miss Nell's refusal, Dr. Thompson was summoned to attend the elder Stott, who, though irritated at what had passed, did not think proper on that account to desert a physician in whom he had great faith.

It was a blazing summer afternoon. One of Dr. Thompson's horses had an accident in the morning, and he walked out to Stott's house, about half-a-mile from the town. After his professional visit, young Stott met him in the hall as he was leaving, and finally asked the Doctor to take a glass of wine. Under ordinary circumstances, Thompson would have declined this offer, but thinking it a kind of conciliatory overture, he judged it wiser to say yes.

"Champagne will be agreeable to-day," said Stott, "and we have just had some in which is fine quality. It drinks rather fiery, perhaps, but a finer wine you

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never tasted, especially when it comes fresh from the ice, as it will to-day."

He went out himself to fetch the wine, and, after a long absence, returned with the bottle opened in his hand, and two glasses, muttering as he came in something about the servants being out for a holiday. The Doctor took a glass, and at the young man's urgent pressure another, and he was thinking of leaving when the scoundrel said:

"Dr. Thompson, I have not acted quite as I ought towards you lately; you know why. I am very sorry, and I wish all bygones to be forgotten."

So they shook hands very warmly, and then Stott said:

"One glass more to clinch it."

The Doctor objected.

"There isn't a headache in a dozen bottles!" cried Stott. "It is as mild as milk. Come, Doctor, you won't refuse to drink to renewed friendship."

So Thompson drained a third glass in quick succession to the other two. He had scarcely swallowed it when Stott cried out:

"Bless me, I have an appointment I quite forgot! So sorry to hurry you, Doctor, but I must meet a friend immediately."

And so fussing, and talking, and protesting, and apologising, he managed to get the Doctor outside of the house within ten minutes after his first glass had been tasted.

No sooner had he left the house, Thompson subsequently said, than he felt rather odd, and he mentally reproached himself for having taken so much wine. But three glasses of champagne did not seem very excessive after a fatiguing day, and, though he felt a little unsteady, he walked on confidently. From that time, however, until he wakened in his own bed, all was either very indistinct or lost in oblivion.

But what an interval there had been! It was market-day in the town, and the streets were full. Several people had stories to tell of Dr. Thompson. With one he had held a short, incoherent conversation. Against another he had jostled heavily, and, after a stupid stare, staggered on without apology. He went into a chemist's shop and gave some outrageous order for a patient. Finally, he fell down in the street, and lay motionless. The bystanders at first thought it a fit, but they were soon undeceived, and, amidst sneers from a few and openly-expressed grief and pain from others, Dr. Thompson was carried home dead-drunk.

The news ran like wildfire. Thompson was found drunk. Rumour gave free translations of the fact, with various additions. Thompson had nearly killed a patient through his liquor. He had fought a crossing-sweeper. He had sat up a whole night drinking. One sagacious person said he had always seen it in his eye. And apart from all exaggeration, the shock to the Doctor's friends and patients was very great. They pitied him, but even the kindest said his position was irreparably lost.

I have heard that within the Doctor's house the grief and shame were inexpressible. Neither wife nor children could reproach him. Years of kindliness and rectitude had impressed them too deeply with the goodness of his character to permit an instant's blame to overshadow the loyalty of their affection. They looked upon the affair as a terrible disaster, but never thought that he had done wrong. For three long weeks Thompson's was a sorrowful home. It is not always the saddest house that has the blinds drawn down.

To make the matter worse, Charlie Stott declared that it was utterly impossible that the quantity of wine Thompson had drunk in his father's house could have upset any man. And, indeed, it did not seem likely to

"No, thank you," pretty Nell said.

produce such total intoxication in the most delicate subject.

So the inference was that Thompson had been drinking elsewhere, and the matter grew darker from examination. One lady of influence in the town, a well-meaning person of the revival school of piety, with that rather callous temper on social matters which I have more than once observed in persons of that type, wrote a solemn letter to the Doctor, remarking that although, socially, the sin he had committed might never be forgotten on earth, yet there was One, and so on. This letter, I have been assured, was, to the poor Doctor, the bitterest of the many mortifications he had to endure.

About three weeks after the event the hopeful Charlie Stott was billiard-playing, and, luck failing him, he drank rather freely to solace his misfortunes or to whet his play.

Growing talkative with his liquor, he said he could tell a capital story, and, without being pressed, went on to say that he had overthrown Dr. Thompson by putting brandy in his champagne.

"I took care," Stott said, "to pour it out at the other end of the room. Being iced, the old fool drank it,

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suspecting nothing until it toppled him over in the High Street."

So far he had proceeded when one of his companions suddenly turned upon him, and said:

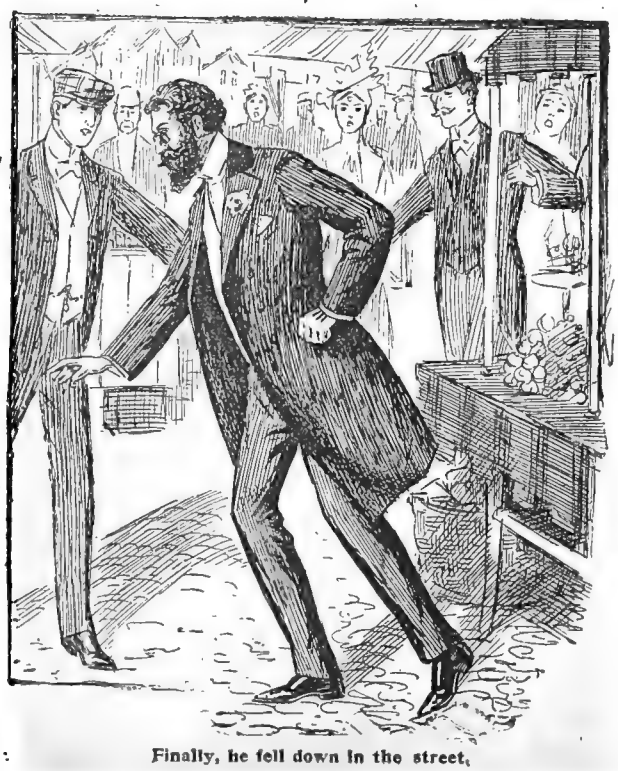
"Stott, I have known you for five years, and I never thought you a gentleman; but, after what you have told us, if ever I speak to you again in the way of friendship——" And he clinched his sentence by a wish framed in language more suited to the scene and the company than the spirit of his speech. So speaking, he walked out of the room.

Stott had sense enough left to grow frightened, and now began to deny what he had before of his own free will confessed; but he might have spared himself the trouble, for the rest of his companions were partial strangers, and but slightly interested in the story.

The other, however, went straight to Dr. Thompson's house, and, asking for his son, told him what he had heard. The two young men consulted upon the matter, and though the resolution they came to was characteristic of youth, the issue showed it was not practically unwise.

Charlie Stott was in the habit of visiting his father's mills every day. These were situated about two miles and a half from the town, and his homeward path lay through some unfrequented fields. As he was returning home, the evening after his game of billiards, he encountered his offended friend, and with him Dr. Thompson's son. Stott looked uncomfortable; but, with a surly nod, he was passing on when Thompson brought him to a stand with a shout of "Stop!" which sent whatever of heart he had into his mouth.

"So, you hound, it was you made my father drunk!" said Thompson fiercely.



Finally, he fell down in the street.

Stott lost his presence of mind.

"You have been letting out my secret, have you?" he said, turning angrily upon his late companion. "You are a man of honour, are you?"

"I hope so," said the other. "At any rate, you have an account to settle with Thompson, which I recommend you to attend to before you deal with me."

Stott looked from face to face, and now, for the first time, noticed two significant oak sticks in the hands of the young men. He prognosticated danger, and grew very pale indeed. But the common resource of the vulgar did not fail him. He at once resolved to lie himself out of the fix.

"Thompson," he said, holding out his hand, with an attempt at generous frankness, "I don't wonder at your being annoyed. If I had done as I was foolish enough to say last night, I don't know what I should not deserve. But, upon my soul and honour, I had too much wine myself then, and invented the whole story. The champagne your father drank at my house was pure champagne, and nothing beside, and that's the truth!"

"Look here," retorted Thompson, taking the stick out of his friend's hand and holding it up with his own. "You can choose whichever of these you like the better, and then defend yourself. With the other I will carve something on you that will last as long as the stain you have put on my father's name!"

Thompson's manner was so fierce in its very deliberateness that a stout heart might have quailed to hear him.

Stott was a coward, and, besides, a sense of guilt and shame helped to unnerve him. He declared he was unwell, would meet him another day, wanted a friend on his own side, at last fairly blubbered, when Thompson suddenly thrust one stick into his hand, and, by a smart cut of the other, announced that the struggle was about to begin.

A short struggle it was. Thompson, after a moment's pause, during which he had drawn back a pace or two, strode up to Stott, and, collaring him, began to lay stroke after stroke upon his quivering frame. Stott shrieked and swore, an art which he had practised largely and on various occasions, but never under circumstances so stimulating to the invention. He vainly tried to wrench himself out of his foe's grasp. As vainly he made a few spasmodic attempts to use his stick. Whack, howl, scuffle; scuffle, whack, howl. Such was the action that followed.

In two minutes Stott had received as sound a thrashing as ever a vulgar coward earned; and, to do him justice, he acknowledged the fact handsomely by his yells. Then Thompson threw him off with a few scornful words. Rage and pain, however, had imparted to Stott something that acted as courage for the moment, and he suddenly sprang forward and gave Thompson a blow with his stick across the temples that nearly knocked him down. Then, to show his prudence as clearly as his valour, he took to his heels, and tore across the fields like one who knew that vengeance was flying after.

Thompson was stunned for a moment, but, recovering himself, dashed after Stott like a fury. The race was not doubtful. Stott had reached the gate of the field, and was opening it, when a stroke cracked across his shoulders, and another, and another, to which all that had gone before were mere ladies' blows. Stott struggled desperately to open the gate, and defend himself at once, when a blow, which he managed to avoid with his

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body, came down upon the hand which was working the latch of the gate, hitting his thumb with such flattening force that he fainted with pain.

The two young men doctored him, bound up his thumb hastily, gave him a little brandy which the umpire had brought with him, and started him home, his small eyes glaring with the hatred and malice he dared not utter. Sorer bones never crossed a threshold than his when he entered his father's house, and the damage done to his thumb was so serious that Thompson's promise of leaving a lasting mark upon him was rigidly fulfilled.

As I have heard, the fellow told his father as many lies as he possibly could, and very artfully concealed the real facts of the case. The old man was infuriated. His son—his eldest son—the boy who would have his twenty thousand a year—beaten by an upstart medical student that hadn't two sixpences in his pocket! Stott senior was full of pride of purse and brutal contempt of poverty. He raved. He would see if there was law in the land. He would this, and he would that, his fine purple countenance displaying various apoplectic tints, as thus to various friends he declared his intentions.

But the affair soon got wind. Plenty of generous feeling was aroused on the other side. Old Dr. Thompson was really beloved, and people were only too delighted to see him honourably extricated from his disgrace. Callers came in showers. Young Thompson was the hero of the hour, and all the girls went wild about him, and one particular pair of eyes contrived to convey their silent appeal of his pluck so bewitchingly that Thompson resolved to take the ball at the hop. He married the bewitching eyes, and settled down as partner with his father.

And as for pretty Nell Thompson, who said "No, thank you," to Stott, she fell in with a young medical man of some private fortune and remarkable ability. The beginning was he loved her, and the end was she married him. No, that was not the end either. He—Dr. Mansfield—joined the Thompson partners, father and son. The firm enlarged its designation to Thompson, Thompson, and Mansfield, and a prosperous firm it has become.

For several miles round all the practice is gathered into this great medical net, and the two young men are rapidly making fortunes. No other doctor has a chance in the district, as one rash practitioner of the Dublin medical school—Titus O'Grady by name—found to his cost. After flourishing his brass door-plate before the public for twelve months, Titus packed up and departed.

"In the whole year," he said, with doleful humour, "I had one patient, and that was a girl with the measles, and even she had only one spot. How can a man demonstrate his abilities in such a place?"

So poor old Dr. Thompson's disaster, like the mishaps of a truly worthy man, turned into good fortune at last. He is supported on one side by an active and affectionate son, on the other by a loyal and talented son-in-law. He sees two blooming rows of grandchildren rising before him, and once in a twelvemonth or so a new face appears suddenly in the line in the oddest sort of way, Dr. Thompson, senior, need not complain; and as for Dr. Thompson, junior, he declares that his good luck began on the very evening that he thrashed that cowardly ruffian Stott.

Now, I discharge you all. Forfeits, mistletoe, Sir Roger, snapdragon, what you please, only never again say that I cannot tell a story in five minutes.

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THE picture given below represents the name of something with which all my readers are acquainted. Stereoscopes will be awarded to the first five competitors whose letters, giving the correct solution, are first opened. All attempts must arrive by Thursday, December 27th, in envelopes addressed "Discoverer," *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C.

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DONE BROWN.

A Tale of the old Smuggling Days.

NOBODY could make it out; at least, everybody said they could not make it out in Oatney—that little dull old south-coast town, abandoned to smugglers and fossillised folk, of ages dead to the rest of the world; and there were not many people in Oatney who would be at the trouble of expressing their views, even if they could make out how a successful run could be effected under the very noses of the Preventive men. In fact, looking at the very large proportion which loafers in Oatney bore to the general population—and loafers always know everything that is going on—the universal ignorance was perfectly astounding.

And so thought Lieutenant Pleydell, the officer in command of the Oatney Preventive Station, as he strode up and down the coffee-room of his temporary quarters at the Bull Inn, in none of the best of humours at the news that a 'run' had been effected in spite of the watchfulness and precautions of himself and his men.

"Heart-breaking work, this," he muttered, "to be stowed away in this dead-alive hole, whilst other fellows are winning kudos and medals and promotion by active service. I've a good mind to cut it altogether, and take to the Church or the Bar, or anything. And I suppose I must spend another Christmas Day here, without a soul to speak to."

It was quite upon the cards—not upon the Christmas cards, for in Anno Domini 1811 those delights of nurseries and abominations of letter-carriers had not been invented—that it was going to be what is called a seasonable Christmas; for the loafers who hung about all day over the parapet above the town green—in olden times the town port and harbour—and who were far more infallible in their weather prognosticatations than the modern Meteorological Office, cocked their heads knowingly at the clouds, and said that "Summat wur comin', it wur."

And so it turned out; for Christmas Day, by some juggling feat known only to itself, dawned somehow or other through the heavy masses of snow-clouds, and the worthy burghers of Oatney began to wish each other a "Merry Christmas" when they had no evidence that the day had even arrived except for a scarcely perceptible lightening of the atmosphere.

It was with anything but a desire to "salute the happy morn" that our Lieutenant stood at the coffee-room window, and gazed out upon as much of the street as he could see for the snow, which drifted about it apparently from each point of the compass, but which seemed to have no deterrent effect upon sundry red-cheeked, red-stockinged damsels on their way to morning service at the old church in Strand Street. He was thus engaged when there came a knock at the door, and the landlord entered.

"I beg your pardon, your honour," he said, "but it's Christmas Day, and me and the Missus, thinkin' you'll be lonely like a-sitting here all by yourself, wants to know if you'd do us the honour of dinin' with us this evenin' at five o'clock."

"Thank you, landlord," replied the officer; "I've some very important letters to write, so I think I'll dine alone to-night."

The landlord withdrew with a look half of surprise, half of contempt, for the man who would choose to dine alone upon Christmas night.

When the door had closed behind him the Lieutenant shook his head and said to himself:

"No, not this time. I'm a young un, but I'm too old a bird to be caught with gammon like that. Get me out of the way, make me half-seas over, and then——why, another run by Dungeness, and sell number two for me, No, I'll dine alone, and keep my eyes open all the time. Besides, the men dine at five o'clock, and they'd take it very strangely if I didn't give them a look in and tell them not to forget that there are such beings as Ned Ward and the Dymchurch gang, in the midst of their jollity."

So during the afternoon the Lieutenant plodded through the almost knee-deep snow to the look-out station situated at the mouth of the river some two miles southward of the town.

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He duly admired the men's attempts at decoration, satisfied himself that there was plenty of good cheer in store, wished the men "A Merry Christmas," at the same time warning them not to forget entirely that there were such beings as smugglers in existence, left them a box of cigars, and turned back homewards.

It had become quite dark by the time he approached the inn, and the snow-clouds which had been sullenly hovering about all day delivered themselves of their pent-up wrath in a fierce blinding storm. So he hastened his steps.

He was somewhat startled to hear, during a momentary lull in the elementary warfare, a deep groan just as he arrived at the inn-door, and, looking in the direction whence the sound seemed to proceed, he could make out, in the dim light cast by the inn-lamp, a dark mass huddled against the opposite wall. Approaching, he saw that it was the figure of a young woman. He lifted her into his room at the inn, placed her by the roaring fire, and put some brandy to her lips, which seemed to revive her.

The Lieutenant saw that she was an exceedingly pretty girl, and revolved in his mind the possible causes which could have led her to her present position.

"Evidently no coast lass," he muttered, as he felt the soft, delicate hair, and marked the refined features of the girl. "There must be some mystery to bring a young and beautiful woman to such a position as this, on Christmas of all nights in the year. Do you feel better?"

"Yes, thank you," replied the girl, in a low, faint voice, "I shall soon be quite well. But tell me, where is he? where is he?" And her eyes flashed at these words, and her hands stretched out wildly as if to grasp something.

"Oh, never mind—wait a bit," said the young officer, "and when you've had something to eat and drink you shall go to bed and to-morrow you'll be as right as——"

"No, no," said the girl, with a shake of the head and a sad look in her large, black eyes, "I must go on to-night."

"Go on!" repeated the Lieutenant, "that's quite impossible. I wouldn't turn a dog out upon such a night as this. Besides, where and how are you going?"

"I must go on to T.," said the girl, mentioning a seaport town three miles from Oatney. "Please don't try to prevent me, as I have a duty, a solemn duty, to perform."

"Well, at any rate," said Pleydell, "you must eat and drink something before you go. It's Christmas night; I'm all alone here, and I shall be delighted if you will stay. So I'll make up the fire, and you sit close to it—you're still shivering—and in a very few minutes dinner will be ready."

He left the fair incognita gazing at the fire with a look of the deepest sorrow on her face.

"By George; she is a pretty girl, and no mistake," he said to himself as he went upstairs to change his reeking clothes and to make himself generally more presentable. "Depend upon it, there's some mystery connected with this, and I'll get it out of her before she goes."

The Bull had been famous for its dinners from time immemorial, and the landlord was quite equal to the task of consoling the Lieutenant for his inforced solitude by setting before him a most tempting little banquet.

Pleydell was pleased to see that the warmth of the room and the generous fare had the effect of completely reviving the strength of his guest, although she still re-

As to Moving About——.

"If I moved about much," said Lizzie Dickinson, "I could hardly get my breath."

Now if she had been a typewriter or a seamstress this would not have been so bad, as—save in acute asthma—the breathing goes on fairly well if one can only keep quiet.

But Miss Dickinson was in service, and how in Mercy's name was she to keep quiet and at the same time keep her place? No; it is upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber; early to rise and late to bed, and a perfect raffle of work between whiles. That's how it is.

So we see that she just *had* to "move about much," although she was really and truly not able to do it. The end was that she got so ill that three years ago—at this date—she was obliged to drop everything and leave her situation.

In her own little account of her trouble, written about the first of December, 1899, the young girl says she had a dry cough that shook her whole body, and a fearful sharp pain in her right side. Her cough was of the kind that frightens young people—and naturally; these coughs sound so like consumption, and there is plenty of that in dear old England.

"My appetite," she says, "was about gone. I stood in the greatest need of nourishment, yet when I looked at my meals, or even thought of them, I turned away with a strange feeling of dislike and disgust.

"Going on this way, and trying to do my work, I got so miserable and weak I didn't know what was to become of me. Sometimes I felt so wretched and nervous that I lay down on the sofa and cried like a heart-broken child.

"The doctors tried to help me, and of course I wanted them to succeed. One attended me for over four months, and I saw several others afterwards; but I kept getting worse in spite of all they could do.

"Finally, I commenced to fancy I was doomed to die, seeing that no good came of the medicines I had used—and there were so many of them. Who it was that wanted me to try Mother Seigel's Syrup is of no consequence to you, even if I could remember. Somebody did, however, and, as I could think of nothing else to do, I did try it. The first few doses made me feel better. I could eat a trifle, and no pain after it. Then my meals began to taste good, and I got strength out of them. It wasn't long before the pain went away, and my breathing was much more natural and easy, and I could move about and turn my hand to a bit of work.

"In this manner it was that I went on improving, and when I had taken four small bottles of Mother Seigel's Syrup I was quite myself again, and *went back to service.*"

A common friend who saw Miss Dickinson recently, at Ashley, near Tetbury, Glos., reports that she is in fine health, and has plenty of colour. Long may she remain well and happy.

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mained silent and sad; and he took advantage of her recovery to press again his questions about her intentions.

"I am sure you will pardon me for my curiosity," he said, "but as I am your temporary protector I feel that I have some right to know whither you are going, and how you propose to make the journey. I dare not ask you to tell me your story although I am convinced that you have a story, and a sad one."

She raised her beautiful eyes to him as he said this.

"Yes, I have a story, and a sad one, but I can only tell it to the nearest Preventive officer, and he, I believe, is at T."

Pleydell started.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "you need not go so far as T. for a preventive officer, as I have the melancholy honour to be one."

"You are!" the girl exclaimed. "Then listen, I have come upon an errand of revenge. Do you know the name of Ned Ward?"

"Ned Ward?" repeated the young officer. "I should think I did. The smuggler you mean?"

"Yes, the same," continued the girl. "Well, I loved him dearly; he gave me his troth solemnly, and I gave him my heart. We were to have been married on New Year's Day; but I found out yesterday that he is already married to another girl, the daughter of a French officer on parole, and that she is at sea with him. And I have come from Dover on foot, all through the snow and storm, on purpose to take my revenge. He is going to run a cargo ashore at ten o'clock to-night."

"To-night! Where?" exclaimed the Lieutenant.

"At Redman's Lane, you know, close by the Ship Inn. He will have this girl with him, and as I know they will be many, and well-armed, to do good you must take every man you can. Then, then I shall be revenged."

Her eyes flashed so as she said this, and she looked so beautifully fierce in her just wrath, that the young officer stooped and kissed her hand.

"You will remain here, will you not?" he said. "I must lose no time, for it is now getting on for eight o'clock."

"I will remain," said the girl, "trust me."

In a very few minutes he was ready, cloaked and armed, and in less than an hour he arrived at the station.

The men were lustily roaring the chorus of "God save the King," as he entered; but at his appearance voices were hushed, and each man stood at "attention."

"I'm very sorry to stop your fun, lads," said Pleydell; "but I've just received news that Ned Ward intends to have a try at Redman's Lane. We shall have our work cut out for us; but we can polish him off, stop his little game and finish ours afterwards."

At this the men burst out with a hearty cheer, they were just in the humour for fun of this sort, and would willingly have gone out to meet with an enemy a dozen times their strength.

In a very short time the whole detachment—some twenty men all told—were ready armed and equipped; forty rounds of ammunition were served out to each man; a parting bumper, to fight against the exposure upon such a night during a five mile tramp, was drained, and they set forth, leaving a couple of men on guard at the station.

They kept along the marsh road by the sea, eyes and ears open all the while for the smallest sign which might betray the proximity or existence of the quarry. The snow drifted in their faces, the wind blew almost a hurricane, and the word of command could scarcely be heard for the roaring of the sea and the shrieking and whistling of the gale. There were lights in the Ship Inn at Redman's Lane, the sounds of singing and laughter were heard as the little body of blue-jackets approached; otherwise there was no sign of life at this wild, out-of-the-way, sequestered spot, known to few but smugglers and fishermen, and doubly wild and remote on this inclement Christmas night.

It was almost ten o'clock by the time the Lieutenant had disposed his men in the most advantageous manner. Still there was not a sign; not a blue light from the sea, not a lantern hoisted from the window of the inn—both well-known signals in the freemasonry of smuggling.

Eleven o'clock; it was weary, bitter work waiting about inactively, searched to the very bones by the wind; midnight, the lights at the inn disappeared, and the sounds of revelry ceased.

There were audible murmurs of discontent and disappointment amongst the men, and Jem Beate, approaching Pleydell with a salute, said:

"I'm afraid, sir, it's no go. They've either done the business, or else the weather's too bad."

"I'm afraid so too, Jem," said the Lieutenant. "My information came from a most trustworthy source; at least, I—I have every reason to believe it to be so."

"Excuse me, sir," said the honest tar, "if I axe you who it was as told you."

"Well, I don't know that I can," said Pleydell. "I might get my informant into trouble."

"No, sir, but was it a man or a woman?" asked the sailor.

"Well, it was a woman," replied the officer.

"Well then, sir, depend on't we've been done brown."

The possibility of this had never occurred to Pleydell, so interested had he been in his patient at the inn, and yet it was humbling to think that such was the case.

It was evident, however, that nothing would be done at Redman's Lane this night; so the word was given to re-form, and the men, wet and shivering, obeyed with alacrity.

When they arrived at the station, Pleydell was surprised to hear no challenge, and ran ahead of the detachment. His surprise was increased tenfold when he beheld the two men he had left on guard gagged and trussed up like fowls in a corner, and on the table a piece of paper on which was scrawled:

> Dere Sir,—We 'ope you have ingoyed yore little walk. We have very much, igspeshally as we have done you regular brown.

Pleydell was beside himself with rage. The two men when released, could only say that at ten o'clock the door was burst open, and before they could spring to their arms they were gagged and bound so that they could neither speak nor move. That by the time occupied by the smugglers the "run" must have been a big one. Pleydell returned to the inn with all speed, and found, as he had feared, that his interesting guest had gone. So angry and mortified was he that he threw up his commission, and tried to forget his humiliation in the study of medicine. Years afterwards he bought a practice in Dover, and had for a patient upon one occasion an elderly woman, who, when he had entered her cottage, saluted him by his old title of Lieutenant. Naturally astonished how a poor woman in her position could have found out about his past career, he asked her.

"Lor' bless you, sir," she said, with a twinkle of her black eyes, "you surely can't have forgotten the Bull Inn at Oatney, where you was so regular done brown."

Frank Abell.

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A Treat for the Children.

When children meet at birthday and other parties, the hostess is naturally anxious to provide the most suitable and acceptable fare. Children do not require heavy meat-food, yet they need variety, and the mother would do well to secure—among other appetising things—a supply of Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies. These excellent Jellies are refreshing and cooling and also nourishing. Chivers' Gold Medal Jellies are *flavoured with ripe fruit juices*, expressed by the firm themselves from the fresh fruit. Their sale and popularity are ever increasing. It is merit that does it all, the merit that takes pains to do the best. Children like Chivers' Jellies—there is no doubt about that. Put it to the vote where they have been used and the "Ayes" have it

unanimously. The *Medical Press*, after careful analysis, says: "Chivers' Jellies are to be commended for the delicacy of their flavour and for their absolute purity." The *Woman's Signal* gives this testimony: Chivers' Jellies can be confidently recommended, they are perfectly pure, absolutely clear and pleasant to look at on the table, and the flavour is simply perfect." A high-class Cookery Teacher writes: "Your Jellies are almost daily on our table, and they are, without doubt, the best in the market."

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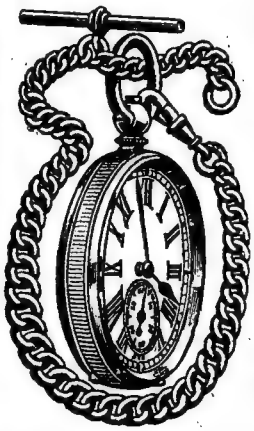

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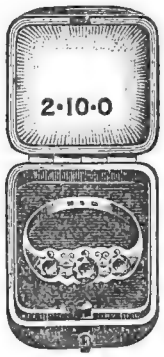

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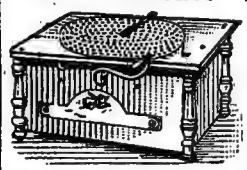

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HOW THEOPHILUS BIGGS BECAME A NEW MAN.

I THINK every man should have a friend of the Jenkins' order, because every man needs stimulating, keeping up to the mark, and Jenkins always keeps me in a state of perpetual bustle. One never knows what Jenkins is going to do next, and no one ever did know just what Jenkins was going to do next. Why, his own mother expected him to be born a girl. But that was just like Jenkins, and I feel sure that if his mother had formed the opinion that he would turn out to be a boy he would have been born a girl.

Jenkins' latest wheeze is to make a new man of me. It would have been no use to tell Jenkins that I did not want to become a new man—that I was perfectly satisfied with the kind of wreck I was. No, the best way is to let him do just what he likes with you, and if you survive the treatment to be thankful. So all I said to Jenkins was that so long as I could wear the same clothes and took the same size in boots after the process he could start the "new man" business as soon as he liked.

Jenkins beamed. He said that when he had finished with me I would thank him with tears in my eyes.

"The fact is, Biggs," he went on to say, "you are getting a trifle too plump. You want thinning down a bit."

I didn't protest; I never do with Jenkins.

"Now, if you let yourself go on like that," he continued, "you will only be sowing the seeds of future discomfort and rheumatism."

I like to hear Jenkins talk like this; it is like sitting on the seashore listening to the waves flopping on the beach.

"Now, what you want is exercise, plenty of it, Biggs, my boy, and you must take it early in the day. You have got a bicycle, and it is not necessary for you to be at your office before nine o'clock in the morning, so that you have everything that is necessary except one thing—to make a new man of you."

"And that one thing?" I asked.

"Will-power," said Jenkins.

I turned slowly round in my chair and faced Jenkins.

"Jenkins," I said, "if there is one thing I pride myself upon more than another it is the possession of strength of mind. Please, please Jenkins, do not attempt to rob me of the consolation that affords me by saying that I do not possess it."

"Well," said Jenkins, "I will put you to the proof. To-morrow morning at six o'clock I will call for you to go for a cycle ride with me."

I slightly amended Jenkins' proposition.

"Meet me at the Cross Roads' Inn at seven o'clock to-morrow morning," I said, and then we shook hands on it.

I had a very happy feeling that night as I went to bed. I was going to become a new man, and as I thought the new man might possible have a bigger appetite, I told my landlady to provide accordingly.

I must have been dreaming when Mrs. Gum called me, for I thought myself spinning along past charming scenery listening to the morning songs of the birds, drinking in the pure air of a delightful sunny morning.

Bang! Hello, there goes my back tyre, I thought, and I got off my machine to examine it. But it was only Mrs. Gum calling me, so I picked myself up from the floor and got back into bed.

"All right, Mrs. Gum," I shouted. "I'm nearly half-dressed and will be down in a minute."

Now this was hardly correct, but then I spoke as I felt. Before getting up I thought it would be best to decide upon the direction to take on this my first early morning ride. There was a choice of three routes. There was the road down past the farm. Grand ride that. All the charms of a peaceful English farm burst upon one as one rode past, the sweet-smelling hay in the fields, the happy looks of the contented—contented——

"It is eight o'clock, sir, and Mr. Jenkins is waiting for you downstairs."

I awoke with a start and went to the door.

"Not a word to Mr. Jenkins," I said to Mrs. Gum. "Go to him in ten minutes and say that you knocked at my door. Don't tell him anything more."

Before that ten minutes was up I had dressed, slipped out the back way, got my bicycle, and then cycled round through a bye-street as hard as I could to the top of the street in which I lived. I then scorched down the street to my dwelling. I perspired quite freely as I opened the front door.

"Has Mr. Jenkins been here?" I shouted to Mrs. Gum whom I met in the hall, at the same time giving her a most expressive wink.

"He is in the dining-room, sir," said my landlady.

As I entered the room where Jenkins was I was saying:

"Well, of all the lazy, weak-minded toads I ever met you are about the laziest, Jenkins."

"I own I was a bit late," said Jenkins rather sheepishly, "but then you might have waited, as I was only ten minutes behind time."

"I never encourage laziness, Jenkins," I said, and then I left him as I wanted to change my clothes.

Jenkins walked with me to the station, but I absolutely

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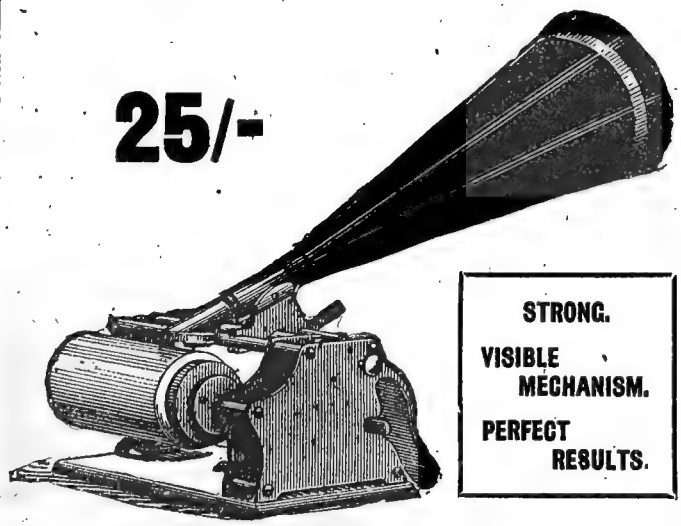

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refused to talk of my cycle ride to him, saying that he should have been with me and that I was not going to encourage laziness. Jenkins offered me a cigar when I had got into the train, and I said to him:

"Jenkins, old man, I freely forgive you, but don't let it happen again."

Jenkins said he would not be able to join me in my ride the next morning, nor the following one, as he would be away from home.

"But keep it up, old man," he said to me. "I can see it is doing you good already."

I really did mean to follow Jenkins' advice, and bought an alarum clock that day in town. I set the clock for 7.15 that night and put it on a chair near my bed. At one o'clock I took the clock off the chair and put it under the bed.

I must have gone to sleep though eventually, for I suddenly jumped into the air and then as quickly dodged beneath the bed clothes to get out of the range of the gatling-guns; but it was only the clock telling me that 7.15 had arrived. I pulled my watch from beneath my pillow to see how long the clock would keep on ringing. It rang for three minutes, and then died slowly in jerks, ending with a slight hiccough. "Not a bad clock, that," I thought. "Only cost 3s. 6d., too."

I then began thinking how a clock like that could be made for the money. I was trying to find out where the profit came in.

It was late that morning when I got to the office, and I thought how disappointed Jenkins would be if he knew that I had missed my usual morning ride. If anyone had seen my face as I went to bed that night they would have noticed a certain look of determination which is always a sign of strength of mind, of great will-power.

I wound up the clock without a word. I didn't care if everyone whose incomes depended upon clocks got twopence or half-a-sovereign on every three-and-sixpenny alarum. I turned out the gas firmly, and then, whilst trekking for the bed, I kicked my toe against the bed-post. Those were the first words I had spoken since coming into the bedroom, and I hope Mrs. Gum didn't hear them.

I sank into a calm sleep.

Thunder and earthquakes, what's that? It was dark, and the clock was ringing for dear life. I struck a light. It was half-past two, and I had set the clock for 7.15. I took the clock up, gently but firmly, opened the window, and dropped it into the yard, where it lay ringing as if it had a contract on hand.

I got into bed again, and was just going to sleep when I heard a violent ringing at the front door bell. Thinking the house might be on fire I hurriedly donned my dressing-gown and went down to see what was the matter.

The policeman I saw told me that he had heard the "burglar-alarm" ringing and had come to see if anything were wrong. I am sorry I spoke harshly to that policeman, and I hope he will forget what I said. My conscience pricks me when I think how I told him it might be the "burglar-alarm" of the people next door, and that he had better wake them up.

Of course, after such a night it would have been folly to have got up so early, and Jenkins agreed with me when I had told him my adventures.

"You should never depend upon alarum clocks," said Jenkins. "Now I know many and very much better ways which will get you up at any hour you please. I have often tried them myself, and never knew any of them to fail."

That is the best of a man like Jenkins; one can depend upon him in any emergency. He can always tell you exactly what to do, how to do it, and, if necessary, what you will look like when it's done.

"Proceed Jenkins," I said. "Tell me all about these methods and I will try each in turn."

"Well, the first is this," said Jenkins. "Let us suppose that you wish to get up at five o'clock."

"Quite a natural desire upon my part," I said.

"Well," continued Jenkins, "to get up at five o'clock all you have to do is to bump your head five times upon the pillow just before you go to sleep. I have never known it to fail," Jenkins added.

"I will try it to-night," I told Jenkins.

I did. I bumped my head six times upon the pillow, and then, thinking to impress whatever unseen agent had the working of the little arrangement that seven o'clock was the time I wished to awake, I put some extra energy into the last bump and nearly caved in the back of my head with the iron railing at the top of the bed. This caused me to think about several of Jenkins' faults, and I mentioned them in the still and peaceful gloom of night.

I didn't awake at seven, and if I had done so I should have gone to sleep again for I felt quite cross with Jenkins. Now I am a peaceful kind of man generally, but when Jenkins offered to unfold some more methods I felt positively bloodthirsty, and spoke to that effect. I didn't want any more of his methods. I had thought of one myself and meant to try it.

I got an iron plate and fixed it to my bedroom door that very night. I showed it to Mrs. Gum and told her to bang upon that iron plate with the coal-hammer I had bought, and to keep on banging until I got up and opened the door. It was thus that I was able to go for the ride before breakfast that I had craved. It was not much of a ride. I got wet through and caught a severe cold, but what I wish chiefly to emphasise is that I did go for a ride before breakfast.

However, if anyone is desirous of buying a really good coal-hammer and an iron plate I am willing from sheer philanthropy to let them go cheaply. I hope someone will buy them and soon, for they rest in my study, and I really do not want to brain Jenkins when next he calls.

Henceforth, if I want to get up early and go for a cycle ride before breakfast, I will make up my mind upon the night before and simply say, "I will get up to-morrow morning at six o'clock," and then of course the rest will follow. W. St. G. Drennan.

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

Nos. 247 to 252.

The prize of £2 has been awarded this week to Mr. J. R. Robinson, of 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate, E., whose attempt was the first correct one dealt with.

The following have each received a copy of "The Marquis of Valrose," by Charles Foley:

J. Solly, 21 Abbot's Park Road, Upton Park, E.
Miss E. Robinson, 60 Sherrard Road, Forest Gate, E.
Miss Mary Ryan, 21 Abbott's Road, East Ham, E.
F. Cheesman, Junction Road, Burgess Hill, Sussex.
F. J. Smith, Alpha House, Saxmundham.
T. Bennett, Doddington, Oxon.
E. Francis, 7 and 8 Regent Street, Teignmouth.
M. Dack, 93 Lee Road, Northampton.
H. Cammack, 32 Radcliffe Street, Liverpool.
Miss N. Daley, 49 Salisbury Street, Liverpool.

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PEOPLE WHO NEVER GROW OLD.

It *is* curious, but it's true. Some people, both men and women, seem never to grow old. What is their secret? They retain their good spirits as well as their good looks. The explanation is simple enough, after all. These people have studied the art of keeping young, just as you would study any other art or science. Perhaps the most thorough and most scientific investigation into the matter that has ever been made is to be found in Professor Boyd Laynard's great work, "SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE." Most people have heard of this book, and certainly everyone who values his or her health and appearance should read it. It is now the standard book on the question with which it deals. Its publishers, Messrs. Hammond, Hammond & Co., 19, 21 and 23 Ludgate Hill, London, E.C., have produced a popular edition. The book, although published at two shillings, will, if ordered direct from the publishers, be forwarded, carriage paid, to all readers of *Short Stories* at the low discount price of One Shilling and Sixpence. Professor Laynard's Book is recommended because it is actually the only book of its kind. It is the Practical and Reliable Guide to Health and Beauty such as men and women in all parts of the civilised world have been waiting for since the pursuit of these blessings became the subject of serious scientific study. In the words of the *Monitor:* "A really practical work on this subject, free from objectionable and harmful features, has long been wanted. Professor Laynard's new book seem to supply the need. . . . It is crowded with useful information from the first page to the last." The *Christian Globe* pronounces it to be "the most remarkable work of the present century." The book stands alone. It is interesting without being frivolous. It is scientific without being dull. It is learned without being obscure. Briefly, it is what Professor Laynard means it to be—a practical guide to the Secrets of Beauty, Health, and Long Life. Among the numerous subjects dealt with in Professor Boyd Laynard's work, the following are but a few (a complete syllabus showing the contents of the whole 127 chapters enumerating upwards of 500 subjects, and divisions of subjects, can be had free on application to the publishers):

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If you look at the picture in the margin you will see that the name is Maxwell. What are the other names?

All you have to do is to write underneath each picture, in the space provided, the name of the player you believe the picture to represent. Then keep the list by you until ONE more list has appeared. The names are those of both Rugby and Association players.

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Example.

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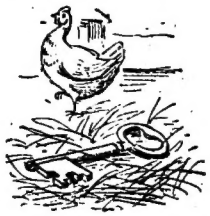

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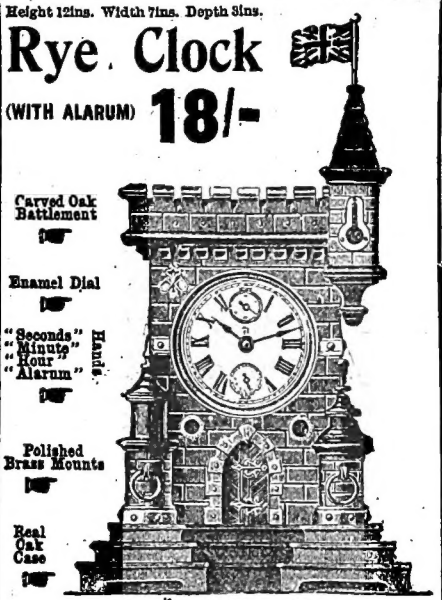

FREE TRIAL, 2/6.

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YOU send us 2/6 with your name and address, and we will send you one on approbation.

IF you approve of it you send us 3/- on receipt, and 2/6 each month for five months, making the full 18/-.

BUT OUR NET CASH-WITH-ORDER PRICE IS 16/- ONLY.

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IF you approve of it, you send us 2/6 on receipt of parcel, and 5/- each month for four months, making the full 25/-. But

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Each Parcel contains 50 Articles.

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6 Dessert Knives.
6 Table Forks.
6 Dessert Forks.
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6 Dessert Spoons.
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1 Pair Sugar Tongs.
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6 Egg Spoons.
2 Salt Spoons.
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